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## John Wesley's doctrine of salvation in relation to his doctrine of God

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**John Wesley's Doctrine of Salvation in Relation to His Doctrine of God**

by

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Submitted to the Department of Theology and Religious Studies,  
King's College, University of London,  
for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree

200**b**

## ABSTRACT

Though John Wesley's intention was to work with the poor and often uneducated people of Great Britain, he often engaged in theological controversy at a highly technical level. The plan of this thesis is to demonstrate that though his doctrine of God followed a scripturally based creedal foundation, his doctrine of salvation embroiled him, at times, in heated controversy. His opponents remained within the various western theological traditions and Wesley responded to his critics by formulating his doctrine of God and salvation within that multi-faceted tradition.

The doctrine of salvation was established from the three offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. Each office will receive separate yet integrated analysis according to Wesley's intention. Particular aspects of the office of Christ as Priest and Prophet created the greatest controversy and it is intended that these particular areas should receive a thorough analysis. From the basis of the three offices of Christ, the question to consider is the adequacy of Wesley's explanation of salvation experienced within humanity. John Wesley claimed that his understanding of salvation remained consistent after 1738 despite the critics who claimed that he vacillated on key doctrinal points.

This thesis will present a defence that Wesley began with a doctrine of a personal God who became incarnate in Christ and continued to work within humanity through the Person of the Holy Spirit. This aspect of his thought was not particularly controversial within the accepted orthodox western tradition. It was the application of his trinitarian theology that created objections to his theological system.

Wesley produced a complicated understanding of salvation yet he believed his theology was based in scripture and could be defended within Christian tradition. This dissertation, in analysing John Wesley's doctrine of God and doctrine of salvation, will investigate the coherency and consistency of his particular approach.

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## Abbreviations

- ACW – Ancient Christian Writers.
- AH – *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus, (ANF, Vol. 1).
- ANF – The Ante-Nicene Fathers.
- APACP – *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Jackson, XI, 366-446.
- BCP – *Book of Common Prayer*
- BE – Bicentennial Edition of *The Works of John Wesley*, General Editors, Frank Baker, Richard Heitzenrater, Oxford: Clarendon Press, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975-.
- Curnock – *The Journal of John Wesley*, ed., Nehemiah Curnock, 8 Volumes.
- DMT – *Dictionary of Moral Theology*, ed., Francesco Roberti, London: Burns and Oates, 1962.
- ENNT – *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*.
- ENOT – *Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
- Institutes – *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin.
- Jackson – *The Works of John Wesley*, ed., Thomas A. Jackson, 14 Volumes.
- JWO – *John Wesley*, ed., Albert Outler, Library of Protestant Theology, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- LCC – *Library of Christian Classics*.
- MHB – *Methodist Hymn Book*, London: The Methodist Publishing House, 1933, 1954.
- NIDCC – *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed., J.D. Douglas, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1974.
- NPNF – The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.
- PWHS – Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society.
- PW – *Poetical Works of Charles Wesley and John Wesley*, ed., George Osborn, 13 Volumes, London: Wesley Methodist Conference, 1868 – 1872.
- SVTQ – St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly.
- TAP – *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed., J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer.
- Telford – *Letters of John Wesley*, ed., John Telford, 8 Volumes, London: Epworth Press, 1931.
- TJEH – The Journal of Ecclesiastical History.
- WA – Luther, *Werke*, (Weimar, 1883- ).
- WML – *Works of Martin Luther*, 6 Volumes, Philadelphia: A.J. Holman Company, 1915 – 1931.
- WTJ – Wesleyan Theological Journal.

## INTRODUCTION

To begin a theological study that deals with human life would require a starting place in the doctrine of God. Surprisingly, in some quarters of Protestant theology this is not as obvious as it sounds. It is not unusual to find in some systematic presentations on the Christian life that humanity and sin precede the discussion on the doctrine of God.<sup>1</sup>

In this approach the problem has to be identified before the solution is established. God is only important if God has a problem to solve. Two examples of this kind of theology, related to studies on John Wesley but not to postmodern theology, can be illustrated as it pertains to the direction of this dissertation. Harald Lindström wrote at the beginning of his work on John Wesley, “The key to the understanding of any interpretation of Christianity must be the interpreter’s idea of the nature of man.”<sup>2</sup> This type of comment places humanity in the prior position to the discussion of God, yet the problem is that humanity is not the key to the study of the Christian life. In a slightly different context, but with a similar method, Leo Cox offered this interpretation, “Before one can discuss with any degree of understanding Wesley’s concept of perfection, he must come to grips with his idea of sin and grace.”<sup>3</sup> The first chapter in Leo Cox’s study is titled, “Sin and Grace.” In fact there is

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<sup>1</sup> The point made here has some resonance with the current agenda in postmodern contextual theology illustrated in Walter Lowe’s comment, “‘Christ and salvation’ recalls the classic theologies, which generally treat first the person and then the work of Christ. In modern theology, however, the common, even predominant, practice has been to reverse the sequence, placing some prefatory notion of salvation before the treatment of Christ. This reversal reflects the Christian community’s struggle to respond to the scepticism of modern Western culture by demonstrating, in one fashion or another a need for Christianity,” in “Christ and Salvation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 2003), 235.

<sup>2</sup> Harold Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation*, reprint, (Wilmore, Kentucky: Francis Asbury Press, 1946, 1980), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Leo Cox, *John Wesley’s Concept of Perfection*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1964), 28.



no explanation of the doctrine of God in his entire work.

It is true that sin and grace are important but it cannot be demonstrated convincingly that this was John Wesley's own model for doing theology. Even his doctrine of Christian perfection was not constructed from the starting point of humanity. This dissertation will argue that John Wesley began with the doctrine of God and that this was the foundation for his doctrine of salvation and the atonement. Now it can be objected that Wesley never wrote an essay on Christology, or Pneumatology, or the atonement but the attempt will be made to show that this does not mitigate against the direction of the thesis.

A misdirected theological structure can overemphasise a certain aspect of John Wesley's thought. Another example of this is Maximin Piette's study. A lengthy quote will reveal the overstatement on the central focus of experiential theology that Piette advocated:

Since practical experience and experimentation had been triumphant in the field of natural science, Wesley was led to transport it to the religious domain - to the field of the supernatural life. Around his own personal experience, and those he was familiar with in his disciples, he gathered and polarized all his theological writings. The experience of the love that God has for him, and of his own love for God, to whom he clings with all his soul - this is the pivot around which, in last analysis, all his doctrinal expressions of thought center; towards this his sermons are directed; and on this movement of religious fervour, which he fostered, finds its mainstay. Such is the root meaning he attaches to justifying faith, on which he stakes his whole schema of things religious: "*A sure confidence of the love of God to them.*"<sup>4</sup>

Piette certainly took Wesley a step beyond what he actually proposed. It is not necessary to deny experience in order to deny that experience is the pivot, especially Wesley's own experience. This thesis will propose that Wesley would have responded

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<sup>4</sup> Maximin Piette, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937, 1979), 436.

negatively to such a schema for theology.

What drove John Wesley was his belief in a personal God who was incarnate in Jesus Christ. That is the objective criteria that was effective when it was applied experientially. For Wesley experience did not determine or control God, neither did experience determine or control the interpretation of scripture. Yet, as has been illustrated, the centrality of God in John Wesley's theology can, at times, be neglected. The proposal defended here is that Wesley's theology cannot be grounded in subjective experience and remain true to John Wesley.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps it is because John Wesley was not a systematic theologian that the theological problem arises and this does create a difficulty for all who work with Wesley's thought. Maximin Piette did acknowledge that challenge when he stated, "And so we must piece together as best we may, making use of material scattered through thousands of pages;"<sup>6</sup> this is the common problem. Wesley's approach was integrative with doctrines, ideas, and thoughts interconnected. Separating out the theological system becomes a challenge, but by doing this a systematic approach can emerge which allows for critical assessment.

The problem of working with John Wesley is not only the recognition that he was not a systematic theologian but there is the challenge in locating the sources which affected his theology. Where did John Wesley get his ideas? This becomes a

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<sup>5</sup> Two books which have followed the theological method that I am suggesting are Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) and Kenneth Collins, *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley's Homiletical Theology*, (Wilmore, Kentucky: Wesley Heritage Press, 1993). A third book, Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) is close but the doctrine of humanity precedes Christology and Pneumatology.

<sup>6</sup> Maximin Piette, 435.



very complicated problem and the exhaustive work still continues. There is no doubt that he was an empiricist and his early mentors appeared to be philosophers such as George Berkley, Peter Browne, and John Norris, along with the later Caroline theologians. Through these varied philosophers and theologians Wesley insisted that God was a present reality to be experienced. It is in this sense that there is an analogy of sensation. As Albert Outler explained, "It is, in this respect, analogous with sensation for sense experience as such is immediate, communicable, and immune from doubt. Doubt and error begin, in both cases, with interpretation and practical judgments - and are as prolific as any skeptic would assert."<sup>7</sup> This meant that experience was goal oriented. Though it could be improved upon or diminished, lost and regained, it was to be experienced existentially, moment by moment.

A comment should be made regarding the distinction between John Wesley's sources for theology and his theology. Dealing with Wesley's sources is important but it can short-circuit his own theological methodology.<sup>8</sup> Studies on his sources identifies

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<sup>7</sup> Albert Outler, "Towards a Re-appraisal of John Wesley as a Theologian," in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert Outler*, eds., Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden, (Grand Rapids Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 50. This type of statement does raise questions of assigning too easily the Enlightenment influence to John Wesley.

<sup>8</sup> Although none believe this list to be exhaustive it is representative of some of the current proposals for discovering sources for Wesley's thought. The first group have attempted to locate the theological roots in the Eastern Fathers, Albert Outler, "John Wesley's Interests in the Early Fathers of the Church," *The Bulletin by the Committee on Archives and History of the United Church of Canada*, Vol. 21 (1983); Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); K. Steve McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love," *WTJ* 26.1 (Spring 1991): 38-103. There is also a group who have tried to find sources in Roman Catholic theology, Maximin Piette, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937, 1979); Aelrud Burrows, "Wesley the Catholic," in *John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John Stacey, (London: Epworth Press, 1988). There have been studies on the Lutheran pietistic sources such as Franz Hildebrandt, *From Luther to Wesley*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951) and in Puritan theology including John Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*, (London: Epworth Press, 1966). Others have assessed the sources within Reformed theology: George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1935); Alan Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: British Evangelical Theology 1640-1790, An Evaluation*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); and others have worked within the sources of the Church of England; Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, (London: Epworth Press, 1970); Albert Brown-Lawson, *John Wesley and the Anglican Evangelicals of the Eighteenth Century*, (Durham: The Pentland Press, 1994). Added to this is the recent PhD dissertation supporting the influence of the later



and includes his work in the Greek and Latin classics, his expertise as an Oxford don in logic, his volumes on natural philosophy and medical experimental practice, and his critique of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and surplus economics.<sup>9</sup>

In 1964 Leo Cox commented, "Most works on Wesley are only biographies and statements about him. Few of them seek to give form to his ideas. Some have been written from the point of view of religious psychology, but very few have given his theological position a close scrutiny."<sup>10</sup> This was true but much has been done since then to alleviate the lack of theological enquiry. Albert Outler rediscovered John Wesley and spent a major portion of his theological career engaged in a re-assessment of Wesley as a theologian. Outler demonstrated the complexity of Wesley's thought and the difficulty in trying to define it. His contribution to Wesleyan studies can hardly be overestimated. Outler believed that John Wesley had made a contribution to theology since his system, "was a coherent, stable, whole deriving its fruitfulness from its single soteriological focus in the Christian evangel of *Jesus Christ* - 'who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made man!'"<sup>11</sup> Importantly, a theological orientation centred on God has been identified. Outler also described Wesley as, "the most important Anglican theologian of the eighteenth century because of his distinctive, composite answer to the age-old question as to 'the nature of the Christian life'."<sup>12</sup> Others, along with Albert Outler,

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seventeenth century theology: Cary Balzer, *John Wesley's Developing Soteriology and the Influence of the Caroline Divines*, (PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, 2004), and Herbert McGonigle's study on the Arminian theology in the Church of England, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> See Albert Outler's essay, "John Wesley - Folk Theologian," *Theology Today* 34 (July 1977) for a list of sermons which include critiques of Adam Smith.

<sup>10</sup> Leo Cox, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Albert Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral - in John Wesley," in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert Outler*, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Albert Outler, "The Place of John Wesley in the Christian tradition," in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert Outler*, 78.



have called for a re-investigation and re-appraisal of John Wesley's theological contribution. For instance, A. Skevington Wood added, "While recognising long hours in research or in producing some definitive doctrinal exposition, it is being realised that his theology, hammered out as it was on the anvil of practical experience and at times of keen controversy, possessed a value that has hitherto been largely unappreciated."<sup>13</sup>

Since Wesley read and wrote extensively it is impossible, with his frustratingly eclectic sources, to expect that he was consistent on every theological point. Regardless of whether a person accepts his theological contribution there needs to be a critical investigation into his theological model. Kenneth Collins has stated the task that needs to be done in order that John Wesley can be properly investigated:

The implications for scholarship, therefore, of the dynamic nature of Wesley's theology is that it is not sufficient merely to explore his doctrinal statements or sermons within the context of their historical settings. Although this preliminary task is vital, one must think systematically as well, and determine the theological setting within the *ordo salutis* where each doctrine is found. In other words, once a specific doctrine is located within the Wesleyan order of salvation, it must be expounded with reference to what both precedes and follows it within that theological framework.<sup>14</sup>

Collins' statement is accurate but within the *ordo salutis* the doctrine of God must be investigated first in order to assess the coherency of the doctrine of salvation. It is the intention of this thesis to investigate how the doctrine of God influenced John Wesley's doctrine of salvation.

The subject matter of this dissertation deals with doctrinal theology. It will recognise that John Wesley wrote from a doctrinal perspective although he never

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<sup>13</sup> A. Skevington Wood, *Love Excluding Sin: Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification*, (Ilkeston: The Wesley Fellowship, n.d. ), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Collins, *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley's Homiletical Theology*, 148.

composed his theology in a systematic manner. A comparison and assessment will be made in terms of Wesley's relationship to the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer* and the 'Articles of Religion.' Wesley wrote his own creedal formulation and his theological creeds provide a useful study in relation to the Church of England. From this we will turn directly to doctrinal theology and outline, with critical assessment, John Wesley's doctrine of God in successive chapters on the Trinity, Christology, and Pneumatology.

This thesis will investigate John Wesley's formation of Christian doctrine and its application. But this will be done in light of Christian doctrine developed within classic creedal Christianity. The Creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon came out of earlier creedal formations and have, from their fourth and fifth century setting, set the boundaries of Christian thought. John Wesley accepted this. This theological groundwork will point the way forward into a critical assessment of Wesley's doctrine of salvation and in this manner Wesley's theological structure will be analysed and evaluated in terms of consistency and coherency.

## Part One: John Wesley's Doctrine of Salvation in Relation to the Book of Common Prayer

### I. Introduction

John Wesley's doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, and Pneumatology did not create controversy but controversy did centre on his understanding of salvation and the atonement. Both his explanation of Christ's Priestly work and Prophetic work created a great deal of opposition and since John Wesley proclaimed throughout his life that he was a faithful but critical adherent to the Church of England, it is appropriate to begin an examination of John Wesley's theology with a comparison to the *Book of Common Prayer* and its Articles of Religion, particularly with the doctrine of salvation and atonement.

It will be maintained throughout this thesis that John Wesley believed that his written Articles of Religion were not outside the acceptable understanding of the Church of England and this adds to the controversy he created. Later, in the respective chapters, Wesley's doctrine of the Trinity, Christology, and Pneumatology will be clarified in relation to the doctrines of the Church of England, but at this point the material shall centre on salvation, the heart of the controversy.

A comparison now will be made between the Articles of Religion in the *BCP* and the *Sunday Service for Methodists in North America*, a document composed by John Wesley. Since both documents were set up in creedal fashion it makes a comparison an obvious possibility. Work on the doctrine of salvation in the *BCP* will be explained independent of Wesley's contribution but it will be argued that Wesley based his document on the *BCP* with his own critical analysis embedded in his theological system. Following this initial comparison there will be an overview of



Wesley's use of the three offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.

### A. John Wesley and His Relationship to the Church of England

John Wesley's relationship to the Church of England has always been a topic of controversy. He could identify himself as a 'High Churchman'<sup>1</sup> and in the context of his time this language referred to a loyal adherent to the Church, yet in September, 1784, five years before his death, he ordained Methodist ministers to work in America. While Wesley maintained his personal loyalty to the Church of England, spiritual and political circumstances saw a Methodist movement growing so fast in America that the situation was barely within his control. During the years of the American War of Independence Methodism did not suffer from lack of growth and once political independence from England had been achieved, religious independence would inevitably become a by-product.

The immediate concern here is to discover Wesley's own attitude towards the Church of England. In doing so it is possible to discover the tensions Wesley experienced towards various parts of the *Book of Common Prayer*, yet this was not a tension foreign to the national Church. Wesley's maternal and paternal grandfathers had been Nonconformists yet their children, Samuel Wesley and Susanna Annesley, returned to the Church of England. The marriage of Samuel Wesley and Susanna Annesley resulted in an intensely thorough loyalty to the Church of England with three of their sons, Samuel, John, and Charles becoming ordained priests. The family was raised on the *Book of Common Prayer* and this influence never left John during his entire life.

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<sup>1</sup> *Letter to the Earl of Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies*, June 14, 1775: "For I am an High Churchman, the son of an High Churchman, bred up from my childhood in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance" (Telford VI, 156).



A brief summary of his ordination and life at Oxford will be helpful. Wesley was ordained Deacon on September 19, 1725, then he was elected to Fellowship of Lincoln College, March 17, 1726, and on Nov. 7 he became Greek lecturer and Moderator of Classes. He graduated with an MA on February 14, 1727 and was ordained Priest on September 22, 1728. This was followed by a brief curacy at Wroote under his father's supervision. In 1729 he left Wroote and returned to Oxford. There he became the recognised leader of the already existing 'Holy Club'.<sup>2</sup>

Frank Baker stated, "There is no difficulty in proving that John Wesley honoured the Church of England and revered her *Book of Common Prayer*."<sup>3</sup> Yet Wesley was never hesitant to criticise what he considered to be the failings in the Church, both before his ordination and after. Within the Church's own ranks, Wesley was part of a long line of continuous criticism and for Wesley the major portion of his criticism dealt with the spiritual life in the national Church.

Still, Wesley offered his constant praise for the *BCP*.<sup>4</sup> Even late in his life he affirmed his loyalty to the Church of England within his theological and political conservatism.<sup>5</sup> One perennial issue for John Wesley was his admitted use of extemporaneous prayer in public, a contravention of the seventeenth century Act of Uniformity. But Wesley was never called into question regarding his preferential use

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<sup>2</sup> A.B. Lawson, *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry: The Source and Development of His Opinions and Practice*, (London: SPCK, 1963), 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 235.

<sup>4</sup> In a letter to the Editor of *Lloyd's Evening Post* (Dec. 1, 1760) Wesley wrote these words against an attack on his loyalty to the Church of England: "You say: (1) 'You have impiously apostized from those principles of religion which you undertook to defend.' I hope not. I still (as I am able) defend the Bible, with the Liturgy, Articles, and Homilies of our Church; and I do not defend or espouse any other principles, to the best of my knowledge, than those which are plainly contained in the Bible as well as in the Homilies and Book of Common Prayer" (Telford IV, 115). A second letter to the *Lloyd's Evening Post* on Dec. 20, 1760 repeated Wesley's claim of loyalty to the Church of England in which he claimed the critics had not supplied sufficient evidence to the contrary (Telford IV, 125).

<sup>5</sup> *Letter to the Earl of Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies*, June 14, 1775 (Telford VI, 155-160).

of this aspect of worship.<sup>6</sup> Wesley considered extempore prayer to be a supplement to the printed prayers even though he admitted that not to use the printed prayers would be a temptation to leave the Church of England.<sup>7</sup>

Frank Baker indicated that Wesley's *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* probably prevented a complete break of American Methodism from the Church of England and British Methodism during John Wesley's lifetime.<sup>8</sup> Yet the eventual break was inevitable once Wesley ordained Methodist ministers to be sent to America, eventually with the *Sunday Service* book. It would not be long before British Methodist ministers would be claiming the same right of ordination and freedom from the Church of England. The call to leave the Church of England began during Wesley's ministry but was never accomplished while he was alive.

# 1. The Book of Common Prayer - The Thirty-Nine Articles and the Doctrine of Salvation

A brief history of the origins of the BCP will be offered which will provide the background for the doctrine of salvation. It will also provide the context for some of Wesley's struggles with various parts of the *BCP* which he had to resolve prior to his ordination. In 1538 Henry VIII invited a small group of Lutheran divines to enter into negotiation with Anglican divines in order to investigate the possibility of a comprehensive act of communion. During these meetings thirteen articles of faith were developed and the first three of the thirteen came directly from the Confession of

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<sup>6</sup> Frank Baker, 234.

<sup>7</sup> *Letter to the Printer of the 'Dublin Chronicle'* June 2, 1789: "It may be observed that all this time, if my brother or I were ill, I desired one of our other preachers, though not ordained, to preach in either of the chapels after reading part of the Church Prayers. This both my brother and I judged would endear Church Prayers to them; whereas, if they were used wholly to extemporary prayers, they would naturally contract a kind of contempt if not aversion to forms of prayer: so careful were we from the beginning to prevent their leaving the Church."

<sup>8</sup> Frank Baker, 243.

Augsburg. The attempt to construct the joint communion did not succeed but the effort gave evidence of the early contribution of Lutheran theology to the eventual Forty-Two Articles of 1553 put forward by Thomas Cranmer.<sup>9</sup>

The eventual construction of the *Book of Common Prayer* was the product of English Tudor Christianity with the *BCP* going through two major editions. The first was the Edwardian document of 1553 and the second during the reign of Elizabeth I. The Elizabethan *BCP* was written in Latin in 1563 and the English version was produced in 1571. Cranmer's *Forty-Two Articles* became *Thirty-Nine Articles* under the guidance of Archbishop Matthew Parker and the *The Thirty-Five Articles of the Lutheran Confession of Württemberg* were of considerable use to Archbishop Parker.<sup>10</sup> It has been acknowledged that the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, though set down by Archbishop Parker, maintained the previous influence of Thomas Cranmer.<sup>11</sup>

The purpose here is to offer an analysis of the doctrine of salvation contained in the *Thirty-Nine Articles* which is outlined in Articles XI-XVIII.<sup>12</sup> The *BCP* asserted that salvation is grounded only in Jesus Christ, the perfect human representative. At the same time the *BCP* was hesitant to affirm limited atonement and thus differed from the Genevan Reformed understanding of predestination.

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<sup>9</sup> Edgar Gibson wrote that the Forty-Two Articles of Religion were indebted to the 1530 Confession of Augsburg. He stated, regarding the Forty-Two Articles, "The first draft of these were certainly the work of Archbishop Cranmer, the impress of whose mind they bear throughout," *The Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), 12. See also pages 7 and 25-26 for a brief account of the historical events. W.H. Griffith Thomas commented: "Of all these Lutheran documents the two of most importance for the Church of England were the Confessions of Augsburg and Württemberg. The former, as we shall see later on, influenced the Articles of 1553, and the later those of 1563," *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles*, (London: Church Book Room Press, 1956), xxxi.

<sup>10</sup> Edgar Gibson, 9; W.H. Griffith Thomas stated, "...in many respects the Church of England stands for a *via media*, but this is very different from saying that our Church is 'midway' between Roman Catholic and Protestantism. On the contrary, no Roman Catholic could do anything but admit that our Articles are essentially Protestant," lvii.

<sup>11</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1986), 10-11.

<sup>12</sup> W.H. Griffith Thomas presented a slightly different organisation than the one outlined here. Thomas included Articles IX and X under Part III. The Life of Faith (Articles IX-XVIII), lix.



## 2. An Analysis of Articles XI- XVIII Including Article II and Article XXXI<sup>13</sup>

Article XI asserted that justification is grounded in the work of Christ, the benefit of which humanity receives through faith. The Article rejected any human work or merit as causing or bringing about justification, thus the doctrine of justification was defined in terms of the Reformation theology of Martin Luther. It is Christ who is the source of salvation. The Article avoided the supralapsarian/infralapsarian debate and connected justification completely within the Christological formulation. Oliver O'Donovan summarised this crucially determining Article by stating:

... But the Augustinian tradition treated the question in abstraction from the salvation-history, as an issue concerning God and the individual human agent alone. The point at which the Reformers, and especially Luther, reinterpreted the question, and recovered a dimension of the biblical treatment which had been lost, was in reconnecting it with Christology and bringing it under the scope of the theses, "only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved."<sup>14</sup>

Article XI was more deliberately connected to salvation history in Jesus Christ who sums up the whole history of humanity according to the will of God.

The Edwardian Article had been less specific on justification than the rewritten statement of 1563 and the rewritten Article was based on the Lutheran Confessions of Augsburg and Württemberg.<sup>15</sup> The expression, "We are accounted," was equivalent to, "to be justified," and it is certain, according to the Article, that justification precedes sanctification. As Edgar Gibson explained, "In the order of thought justification precedes sanctification. But together the blessings stand or fall. If a man is justified we may be sure that he is being sanctified, however imperfect his condition may be."<sup>16</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas explained the Anglican position on

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 1 for the creedal statements.

<sup>14</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, 77-78.

<sup>15</sup> Gibson, 388.

<sup>16</sup> Gibson, 397.



justification and sanctification. He distinguished justification and sanctification by stating that justification is solely an objective work and refers to a person's standing before God. Sanctification he linked to the inner life or actual state of a person.<sup>17</sup>

Gibson further explained the Anglican understanding of faith contained in the Article. He stated, "Faith, then, is a principle of trust and reliance on God and His promises, which leads to practical action and issues in good works."<sup>18</sup> Faith is the human response to the prior work of God.

Article XII allowed for good works only as the fruit of justification through faith. Good works are acceptable 'in Christ,' but are not within the natural ability of humanity. Good works as human acts independent of Christ will 'endure the severity of God's Judgement;' consequently, the life of the believer is a result of union with Christ. Oliver O'Donovan stated that Article XII came from Matthew Parker and was intended to present a positive account of good works.<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that good works are not a further work of God beyond justification. The *BCP* asserted that "we are accounted righteous before God" with the emphasis on a continuing righteousness as the identity of the Christian. This is based on the finished work of Christ and therefore God's decision regarding human righteousness is final because Christ's work is complete. No human can secure further favour with God apart from the finished work of Christ. Yet what Christ finished in the atonement is not finished in the believer's life. Still, God does not respond to the human initiative but humanity responds to the divine initiative. The Article recognised that human works are appropriate to God only in the sense of coming from God's prior initiative of grace.

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<sup>17</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles*, (London: Church Book Room Press, 1956), 189-190.

<sup>18</sup> Gibson, 400; Griffith Thomas stated: "...faith in its complete sense includes the assent of the mind and consent of the will, the credence of the intellect and the confidence of the heart. As such, it is best understood as trust, the attitude of one person to another," 191.

<sup>19</sup> O'Donovan, 78; also, Gibson, 410.

The emphasis on faith shows that this is about the work of God within the person. It is a statement on the lifelong progressive sanctification which includes a constant change from within.<sup>20</sup>

Article XIII had the clear function of denying the medieval concept of 'congruous merit.' Humanity could not gain any merit from God for salvation. Even if God's grace precedes justification, it is justification that determines salvation, not any understanding springing from prevenient grace. At this point Oliver O'Donovan's assessment of Thomas Cranmer is important. The Reformers had rejected 'congruent merit,' that is, merit in which humans could co-operate with God and receive credit for such co-operation. Cranmer, according to O'Donovan, was not specific enough on this issue. Cranmer had rejected 'congruent merit' but as O'Donovan stated:

He appears to say simply that God looks on good deeds as sinful if they are not performed by believers - a curious attribution of arbitrary wilfulness to the divine, itself reminiscent of late medieval voluntarism. Thus Cranmer failed quite to lay the medieval ghosts to rest, and they have continued to live their shadow-life, both among Protestants at large and among the Anglicans who looked specifically to him for guidance.<sup>21</sup>

The Article did not deny that grace can precede justification but the Article denied that such grace is effective in establishing salvation. The title of the Article was then a reference to works that precede justification and their lack of effectiveness for salvation.

Like Article XIII, Article XIV is opposed to the medieval system which allowed human effort to be acceptable to God in order to attain salvation. The word, supererogation, developed a meaning of paying over and above what was required.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The relationship between Article XI and XII is stated by Griffith Thomas: "The truth of the Lord Jesus Christ as our righteousness before God (Article XI), and also our practical righteousness in dwelling in us and producing good works (Article XII) is one that we have to keep at once distinct and united," 207.

<sup>21</sup> O'Donovan, 82.

<sup>22</sup> Gibson, 425-426.

The idea of penance was known in the Church by the second century and was a norm of Church life.<sup>23</sup> Indulgences appear to enter the medieval life of the Church during the end of the eleventh century as motivation to join the Crusades.<sup>24</sup> Indulgences lessened the requirement of penance<sup>25</sup> and were also effective in raising the finances for the building of churches and cathedrals. By the fifteenth century they became useful in easing 'souls' in purgatory. Indulgences tended to evolve in the Church without any particular system of thought. Eventually as moral and ethical questions arose a response was required and by the thirteenth century 'works of erogation' became a means to explain works that went beyond what was required but were not wasted. These 'works' were for the benefit of the Church to bestow upon the faithful.<sup>26</sup>

The intention of Article XV already had been identified in Articles II, IX, and X. The Article made strong statements on several key theological propositions. First, only through Christ are the sins of the world dealt with and cancelled. There is therefore no room in Article XV for any concept of a righteousness achieved by human effort. Secondly, Christ is the human representative who was free from sin.

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<sup>23</sup> Karl Rahner offered a summary of the theology and practice of penance beginning with the NT and then proceeded into its history and practice from the second century onwards in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XV, "Penance in the Early Church," (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), 1-23.

<sup>24</sup> Serafino de Anelis, "Indulgences," *DMT*, 621, "Indulgences, properly so-called, appear in the eleventh century; among them, the notable ones were connected with the Crusades;" and Robert G. Clouse, "Indulgences," *NIDCC*, 508, "...it was not until the eleventh century that indulgence grants appeared which relaxed penitential acts on the condition that contributions be made to a church or monastery. The practice of granting indulgences became more widespread with the advent of the Crusades, beginning with the First Crusade in 1095 when Urban II promised the remission of all penance to those who set out to liberate the Holy Land."

<sup>25</sup> Abelard (twelfth century) recognised the abuse of penance in stating, "And because a priest's covetousness is very often no less than the people's (according to the prophet, 'And the people will be as priests'), priests' greed misleads many of the dying, promising them a vain security if they offer in sacrifice what they have and buy masses they should never have gotten for free," in *Ethics* Book I. 160 quoted from, *Ethical Writings : Ethics and Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*, trans., Paul Vincent Spade, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), 36.

<sup>26</sup> Gibson, 435 lists such 13<sup>th</sup> century theologians as Alexander Hales (1245), Albertus Magne (1280), Bonaventure (1274), and Thomas Aquinas (1270) who supported indulgences.



The Article was not quite as clear on defining precisely the human nature Christ assumed other than to say, “made like unto us in all things, sin only except.” Was this a sinful human nature but sinless in act, or a human nature weakened by sin but not sinful in nature or act, or was Christ’s human nature a version of the pre-Fall humanity? The last of these appears to be ruled out.

There is in the Article the assertion of the human dependence on Christ. As Oliver O’Donovan stated with emphasis, “Article 15 rejects any conception of justification as an *Achieved possession within our individual past histories*.”<sup>27</sup> This leads to the further conclusion that justification has been completed by Christ but Christ through the Spirit continues to work in personal lives. This is required since sin remains in humanity.

Edgar Gibson indicated the changes in this Article that occurred between 1553 and 1571.<sup>28</sup> The Article clearly asserted that ‘deadly’ sins are pardonable sins. At various times in the history of the church there was propounded the view that sin committed after baptism left a person in a state facing the judgement of God as unforgiven. Leaving baptism until the event of death was not uncommon in the early history of the church. During the sixteenth century John Calvin had accused the Novatians and Anabaptists of following this position and then supporting a form of eradication of sin.<sup>29</sup>

The Article unequivocally asserted that it is possible to fall into sin after

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<sup>27</sup> O’Donovan, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Gibson, 444-445.

<sup>29</sup> *Institutes* IV. I. 23: “The Novatians, in ancient times, agitated the Churches with this dogma, but in our day, not unlike the Novatians are some of the Anabaptists, who have fallen into the same delirious dreams. For they pretend that in baptism, the people of God are regenerated in a pure and angelical life, which is not polluted to any carnal defilements. But if a man sin after baptism, they leave him nothing except the inexorable judgement of God.”

regeneration. Thus the Article condemned an acceptance of 'sinless perfection'.

Griffith Thomas believed that the Article rejected the notion of the suppression of sin as too centred on human conduct while the Anabaptist tendency to assert eradication was unrealistic. Thomas proposed that the Article supported an idea of 'counteraction.' This meant that the presence and power of sin within are counteracted by the presence and greater power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup> This retained the idea of sin remaining in the believer while the believer could experience victory over sin. At the same time the Article appeared to indicate the possibility of falling away with the equal possibility of returning to grace, yet, on this point the Article is not entirely clear. Could a person completely fall from grace and lose the benefit of salvation? It would appear that the wording of the Article could be interpreted in this manner but even that would not be a required reading. The lack of clarity brought this Article of Religion into conflict with the strict Calvinists who insisted that the complete falling away from grace and subsequent restoration would be impossible. Since in this theological system a person could not fall away, therefore, restoration would not be needed. Or, if a person 'fell away' it was because such a person was not genuinely a regenerated person.

We can now turn to the controversy contained in Article XVII. The topic of predestination and election sprang out of the Augustinian-medieval legacy<sup>31</sup> though the *BCP* constructed the definition in a manner distinct from the strict Augustinian tradition. At the same time, it must be remembered that all Anglican theologians of the Edwardian-Elizabethan era were Augustinian in orientation. Predestination was thus an important concept. Griffith Thomas maintained that the

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<sup>30</sup> W.H. Griffith Thomas, 233.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, *A Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints* (NPNF, Series 1, Vol. V, 495-519), for the basic orientation of Augustine's position on predestination; see especially Chapters 10-14, 23, 29-31.

Protestants, exiled under Mary, returned to England under Elizabeth with a renewed vigour for the Calvinism of Geneva.<sup>32</sup> These supporters of the Church of England were also defending Theodore Beza's construction of predestination and were somewhat unhappy with the Article on predestination and were intent on creating an Article more in line with the Calvinism of Theodore Beza. Thomas concluded, "This effort was prevented, though the controversy raged furiously during the whole reign of Queen Elizabeth."<sup>33</sup> In the *BCP*, God's predestination is a Christologically centred doctrine, humanity has been chosen, or elected, 'in Christ', not by the eternal decrees reserved for a select few. Yet not all humanity has claimed this Christological benefit, or, as the *BCP* stated, "whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation." Such as who are in Christ have been "justified freely," "made sons of God by adoption," "made like the image of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ," "They walk religiously in good works," and consequently, "attain to everlasting felicity."

What the Article did not construct was a statement on the eternal decrees of God made beforehand which Adam and Christ then must enact. Instead the emphasis lay in Christ, as the elected one, and humanity is called to participation in that election. Thus the emphasis lay in the trinitarian relation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit lived out for the benefit of creation. It is clear that the *BCP* had a contribution on predestination and election distinct from the later *Westminster Confession* (1647).

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<sup>32</sup> Calvin's position on predestination was outlined in the *Institutes* III. 21. The footnote in the LCC, Vol. 2, 920 indicated that predestination was summarised in the section on the doctrine of salvation not in the section on the doctrine of God. The interpretation of Calvin's order has become controversial in studies on Calvin and Calvinism. Two prominent works have identified the problem. R.T. Kendall in *Calvin and the English Calvinists to 1649*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), claimed that Theodore Beza had altered significantly Calvin's theology by placing predestination in the doctrine of God. On the other hand, Paul Helm in *Calvin and the Calvinists*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) countered by insisting that Beza's theological system was not out of line with the theological intention of Calvin.

<sup>33</sup> W.H. Griffith Thomas, 243.



Whereas the *Westminster Confession* listed its statement on predestination in Chapter 3, after the statement on God (Chapter 2), the *BCP* listed predestination as Article XVII in the section on salvation. While the *Westminster Confession* supported ‘double predestination,’ the *BCP* did not need to proceed in that direction. And, while the *Westminster Confession* leaned in an individualistic direction the *BCP* need not be so interpreted.

There was a marked intention that limited atonement was not a required reading of the Article. The Article suggests that advocating a limitation on God’s love contributed to a fatalism of life; at the same time phrases in the Article tried to avoid the antinomian pitfalls. Grace was to act within a person in such a manner that the person recognised the work of the Holy Spirit which would, “kindle their love towards God.” Edgar Gibson added to this the important position contained in the baptismal prayer for infants which admitted to the possibility of losing the faith. The prayer stated, “...and ever remain in the number of His faithful and elect children.” Gibson interpreted this to mean, “an expression which implies the possibility that he may fall and lose his salvation.”<sup>34</sup> Edgar Gibson, as a nineteenth century Anglican, appears to interpret the *BCP* as supporting the possibility of losing one’s election. Still, the point of the Article stated that there was not a requirement to support limited atonement and there was a dynamic life within the Christian experience that did not lean towards fatalism.

Article XVIII began with the negative criticism that salvation cannot be gained by any human assertion of salvation by works. Edgar Gibson missed the

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<sup>34</sup> Gibson, 468.

point of the Article when he asserted, “Consequently, whatever individual teachers may have maintained, the Church as a whole has never committed herself to the assertion that the heathen must be lost, nor denied to them the possibility of salvation.”<sup>35</sup> The Article does not deal with Gibson’s comment. More to the point, Oliver O’Donovan considered this Article to be the key to the doctrine of salvation in the *BCP*. The Article is a reference to Acts 4:12 and it created an exclusiveness for Christ as the basis for salvation. As O’Donovan stated, “It arises from the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth, the anointed of God and the Son of Man, the representative not only of Jewry but of all mankind before the throne of God.”<sup>36</sup> Article XVIII supports the theological position that salvation is exclusive in the sense that it is grounded in God through Christ, only. It is inclusive in that it is effective for all humanity.

Article II defined the Person of Christ in the language of Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451). This Christological statement will be assessed in the chapter dealing with John Wesley’s Christological formulation but here the concern is with the final statement in the Article, “who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile His Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.”

Article II asserted the actuality of Christ’s human suffering and this became the affirmation against any form of Docetism which denied Christ’s true humanity. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, the early second century theologian identified Docetic teaching with the phrase, “But if it were as certain persons

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<sup>35</sup> Gibson, 491; W.H. Griffith Thomas, 259: “The title of the Article both in Latin and in English shows that there is no reference whatever to the heathen, but only to those who are acquainted with the Christian religion.”

<sup>36</sup> O’Donovan, 76-77.

who are godless, that is unbelievers, say, that he suffered only in semblance (δοκεῖν), being themselves semblance (δοκεῖν), why am I in bonds?"<sup>37</sup> A clearer statement on docetic Christology was made by Irenaeus in the late second century. He identified the source of docetism as Simon Magus, or Simon the Samaritan. Simon, Irenaeus claimed, identified himself as the Christ and was to win back his wife, Helena, so Irenaeus stated:

For this purpose, then, he had come that he might win her first and free her from slavery, while he conferred salvation upon men, by making himself known to them. For since the angels ruled the world ill because each one of them coveted the principal power for himself, he had come to amend matters, and had descended, transfigured and assimilated to powers and principalities and angels, so that he might appear among men to be man, yet he was not a man; and that thus he was thought to have suffered in Judaea, when he had not suffered.<sup>38</sup>

The *BCP* affirmed the historic creedal position of the church that Christ was truly human and truly suffered as a human.

Article II used the phrase that Christ truly died in order "to reconcile His Father to us." There is an understandable objection to this phrase. It can lead to the conclusion that the Father had to be reconciled to humanity along with the idea that humanity needs to be reconciled to God. It will be noted later in the dissertation that John Wesley made his own contribution to the idea of the Father's reconciliation to humanity.

To accept the phrase implies a combination of sacrifice and propitiation. The word propitiation conveys the meaning of anger that needs to be turned away. So Christ is the sacrifice that turns away God's anger. In a positive sense, it is God's love that overcomes God's anger against sin. Christ pays the debt

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<sup>37</sup> Ignatius, *Letter to the Trallians* 10, (TAF, 148).

<sup>38</sup> Irenaeus, *AH* I. 23.3.



through his humanity and overcomes God's anger against sinfulness within humanity.

Article XXXI is very close in language and terminology to Article II. This Article was designed as a clarification on eucharistic practice with the restatement of Christ's complete atonement. The important words are, "perfect redemption," "propitiation," and "satisfaction." The perpetual practice of the Eucharist was not understood as supplementary sacrifices beyond that accomplished by Christ. In addition to "perfect redemption" and "propitiation," Christ's death 'satisfied' God's sense of justice and thus brought reconciliation.

## B. John Wesley's *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*

### 1. John Wesley, the Church of England, and the Doctrine of Salvation

John Wesley's *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*<sup>39</sup> was his revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*, designed for a Methodist constituency quite distinct from anything that Wesley experienced in England. The *Sunday Service* manual became integral to understanding Wesley's approach and adaptability to a situation where the national church was not a recognised authority. *The Sunday Service* is important to gain a picture of Wesley's liturgical theology, some of his personal preferences for worship, his ability to work with new political systems, and, important to this study, it contained Wesley's *Articles of Religion*. As James White stated in the recent edition of the 1784 service book, "The *Sunday Service* is the heart of his bequest and manifests his intentions most

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<sup>39</sup> *John Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, (The United Methodist Publishing House and the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and the Ministry, 1984).

explicitly.”<sup>40</sup> The intention here is not to do a detailed study of the textual variants of the *Sunday Service* but a brief outline of the history of the origins of the *Sunday Service* in light of Wesley’s relationship to the Church of England is useful.

Since North America did not have an established national church, John Wesley had to take the new political and religious environment into consideration. The service material did not relate to a parish structure but was intended for the Methodist itinerant American minister. The *Sunday Service* encouraged extemporaneous prayer with a preference for hymnody rather than anthems. It was designed specifically for the Sunday service and was not useful as a weekly worship manual and only a few of the special Sundays of the liturgical year were acknowledged. The characteristics of the Methodist religious life can be partly attributed to the flexibility of worship which benefited the frontier mindset in America.

In 1784 John Wesley composed a letter to the American Methodist leaders, Dr. Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury, and others, which offered a brief explanation for his reasons to ordain ministers for America and then he stated that he had finally prepared the service book to be delivered to North America. His proposal stated, “And I have prepared a Liturgy, little differing from that of the Church of England, (I think, the best constituted national Church in the world,) which I advise all the Travelling Preachers to use on the Lord’s Day, in all congregations, reading the Litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> James White, *Preface to John Wesley’s Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to ‘Our Brethren in America,’ Sept. 10, 1784 (Telford, VII, 239).

The *Sunday Service* was not an abridgement of the BCP but was more accurately a revision for a new audience. Wesley left his stamp of approval for the BCP in his *Preface* to the *Sunday Service*. He stated, "I believe there is no Liturgy in the World, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid, scriptural, rational Piety, than the *Common Prayer of the Church of England*."

There is an interesting note to the first delivery of the *Sunday Service* to North America. It was originally printed at Oxford in 1784 but to save costs the binding was to be done in America. By the time the unbound copies arrived in North America alterations by unknown editors had already occurred during the trip across the Atlantic. Five years later, on June 20, 1789, Wesley wrote a letter to Walter Churchey in which he stated that he knew Coke was making further revisions without his consent.<sup>42</sup> Other revisions continued to be made and though Wesley sent a few alterations himself not all of these were maintained by all the ministers.<sup>43</sup>

Questions can be raised concerning Wesley's actual support for the BCP despite his numerous statements of loyalty to the Church of England. It must be acknowledged that though Wesley repeatedly commented that the BCP was unsurpassed in any national church setting, he was not uncritical of the BCP. Wesley was acquainted with the history of criticism towards the BCP and his own revision bears some imprint of various Puritan objections. Personal criticisms were not new to the Church of England *Prayer Book* as Puritans, ancient Liturgists, theological liberals, and non-jurors had raised their

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<sup>42</sup> To Walter Churchey, June 20, 1789, (Telford VIII, 144-145).

<sup>43</sup> A brief textual history is given by James White in his *Introduction to John Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, 11-13.



objections to various points in the *BCP*.

## 2. Historical Background to the Relationship Between Methodism and the Church of England

The winter of 1754-55 saw the controversy of the relationship between Methodism and the Church of England rise in intensity. The 1755 Methodist Conference dealt directly with the issue and John Wesley presented a paper to be read at the Conference. In the document Wesley defined the Church of England according to the *BCP* and then indicated that Methodism gave support to the doctrines in the *Articles of Religion* and *Homilies*. Then he listed four qualifications:

1. "preaching the gospel in all places;"
2. "using sometimes extemporary prayer;"
3. "assisting those which desire to forward each others' salvation;"
4. "encouraging others to do the same, though they are not episcopally ordained."<sup>44</sup>

Wesley considered none of the four qualifications required separation from the national Church. To separate would constitute refraining from the public service of the Church; "The prayers, sermons, and Lord's Supper. This would amount to a formal separation from the Church."<sup>45</sup> And he viewed separation as tantamount to losing the Methodist influence in England. Those who had separated, according to Wesley, lost the impact of reform.<sup>46</sup>

Not to separate was determined by the lay preachers agreeing not to administer

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<sup>44</sup> *Ought We To Separate From The Church of England* II. (I) (BE) 9: 568-569.

<sup>45</sup> *Ought We To Separate From The Church of England* II. (II). 3: 569.

<sup>46</sup> *Ought We To Separate From The Church of England* (IV). 10: 575: "But if upon any provocation or consideration whatever they separated and founded distinct parties, their influence was more and more confined; they grew less and less useful to others, and generally lost the spirit of religion themselves in the spirit of controversy." He identified what he believed to be the calling of the Methodist societies: "as messengers of God to those who are Christians in name but heathens in heart and life, to call them back to that from which they are fallen, to real, genuine Christianity" (V. [1]: 577).

the sacraments which naturally would have led them to the Dissenters' side.<sup>47</sup> Wesley would write another document in 1758 titled, *Reasons Against A Separation From the Church of England*<sup>48</sup> which was a briefer summary of the 1755 document.

John Fletcher, an ordained priest from Madeley, had been in correspondence with John Wesley during this juncture of defining eighteenth century Methodist identity. Fletcher wrote to Wesley on Aug. 1, 1755 and in the letter Fletcher acknowledged some of the moral deficiencies of the Church of England, then he stated, "Pelagian, Calvinian, and Popish dirt cleave to her articles, homilies, liturgy, and rubricks." Fletcher indicated that he considered Wesley to be one who could initiate a proper reform in the church. He proposed to Wesley how this could be done and the fourth point in his recommendations stated, "That a pamphlet be published containing the 39 Articles of the Church of England rectified according to the gospel, together with some needful alterations in the liturgy and homilies - such as the expunging the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian creed, etc."<sup>49</sup> John Fletcher took this so seriously that he proposed John Wesley should present his revisions to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the bench of bishops. Fletcher's recommendations went so far as to suggest that Methodism should become a recognised distinct society within the Church of England. Fletcher's motivation was clear. Here was a proposal to keep Methodism in the Church of England.

In his defence of the Church of England Wesley accepted the definition of the Church according to Article XIX in the *BCP*. He then defined the Church of England more specifically with, "that body of people, normally united, which profess to hold

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<sup>47</sup> Frank Baker has summarised this pivotal juncture in Methodist history in *John Wesley and the Church of England*, (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 160-179.

<sup>48</sup> *Reasons Against A Separation From the Church of England* (BE) 9:332-349.

<sup>49</sup> *Revd and Dear Sir*, Thursday, Aug. 1, 1775 (Curnock, VIII, 332).

to the doctrine contained in the Articles and *Homilies*, and to use Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Public Prayer, according to the *Common Prayer Book*.”<sup>50</sup> He then went on to assert, “We do not separate from the *doctrine* of the church. We receive both the Articles and *Homilies* as excellent compendiums of Christian doctrine, and can make it appear that we keep closer thereto than any other body of people in England.”<sup>51</sup> But then Wesley added this comment in reference to the Articles and *Homilies*, “For though we take knowledge that the writers of them were fallible men, though we will not undertake to defend every particular expression in them, yet we cannot but very highly esteem them as yielding to few human compositions.”<sup>52</sup>

At times Charles Wesley thought that his brother, John, had not sufficiently pushed hard enough to keep Methodism in the Church of England. After John had published his *Sunday Service*, he wrote a letter to Charles in which he acknowledged the concern over ‘mitred infidels’ as Bishops in the Church of England but then he added, “I do, indeed, vary from them in some points of doctrine and in some points in discipline - by preaching abroad, for instance, by praying extempore, and by forming societies.” Then he added a comment, “but not an hair's breadth further than I believe to be meet, right, and my bounden duty.”<sup>53</sup> This indicated that John Wesley was aware that the Church of England was accustomed to critical assessment and such assessment was not a sign of disloyalty to the church and her doctrines.

### 3. John Wesley, the Articles of Religion, and the Doctrine of Salvation

John Wesley offered no explanatory treatise on his decision to list twenty-

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<sup>50</sup> *Ought We to Separate from the Church of England*, Frank Baker, 327.

<sup>51</sup> *Ought We to Separate from the Church of England*, Frank Baker, 328.

<sup>52</sup> *Ought We to Separate from the Church of England*, Frank Baker, 328.

<sup>53</sup> Letter to Charles Wesley, Aug. 19, 1785 (Telford VII, 285); cf. Letter to Rev. Samuel Walker, Nov. 20, 1755 (BE) 26: 611-613.



four, and later twenty-five, *Articles* for use in North America. Interpreters are left to make historical and theological assessments from Wesley's writings to explain his *Twenty-Five Articles of Religion*. The doctrine of salvation is stated in Articles IX-XII. Article IX, *Of the Justification of Man*, is an exact quote from Article XI in the *BCP* though the final phrase from the *BCP*, "as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification" is not in Wesley's statement. Since the *Homilies* did not have a Homily with that title Wesley presumably thought it not necessary to include the phrase.<sup>54</sup> The same occurs with Article X, *Of Good Works*, it is the same content as Article XII in the *BCP*. There are only insignificant word changes. Wesley produced no counterpart to Article XIII, *Of Works Before Justification*. There is no evidence in his own *Sermons* or *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* that he would have disagreed with Article XIII but he may have considered it an unnecessary repetition of the statements in *Of the Justification of Man*. Article XI, *Of Works of Supererogation*, is an exact quotation from Article XIV in the *BCP*.

It is interesting that John Wesley nowhere in his *Articles of Religion* had a statement on the sinlessness of Christ, yet Article XV in the *BCP* dealt specifically with that issue and Wesley's *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* repeatedly asserted the sinlessness of Christ. The sinlessness of Christ in scriptural passages such as Rom. 8:3; II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26 all have Wesley's support. It can be noted that the Article in the *BCP* ends with the statement, "and if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." This phrase, though scriptural, may have caused concern for Wesley if it was left to stand on its own. Wesley eventually preferred the definition for holiness as, "love excluding sin." There is a suggestion

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<sup>54</sup> The *BCP* reference to the Homily on Justification appears to be a reference to the third Homily in the First Book, 'A Sermon of the Salvation of Mankind by only Christ our Saviour from Sin and Death Everlasting.' The next two Homilies add support to the third Homily.

here that Wesley preferred not to create a controversy with Article XV of the *BCP* by not repeating the final phrase and thus not including the Article. An assessment of Wesley's definition of Christian Perfection, or holiness, will occur in the section on the Prophetic Office of Christ.

Article XII, *Of Sin After Justification*, has the same wording as Article XVI, *Of Sin After Baptism* in the *BCP*. It should be noticed that Wesley changed the wording in the title from *Baptism* to *Justification*. A few comments on John Wesley's understanding of baptism would be useful at his point. John Wesley did not deny baptismal regeneration but neither did he support an automatic sacrament of salvation. The importance of salvation centred on justification not baptism. Wesley produced a document named, *Treatise on Baptism*,<sup>55</sup> which helped explain some of his points relevant to the discussion. The first benefit of baptism is, "washing away the guilt of sin,"<sup>56</sup> to which Wesley added that baptism is the "ordinary instrument of our justification."<sup>57</sup> With this, Wesley supported infant baptism, as he claimed it was defensible through "Scripture, reason, and primitive, universal practice."<sup>58</sup> He proceeded to make a claim for baptismal regeneration in the statement, "If infants are guilty of original sin, then they are proper subjects of baptism; seeing, in the ordinary way, they cannot be saved, unless this be washed away by baptism."<sup>59</sup> This was supported by his additional comment, "Infants need to be washed from original sin; therefore they are proper subjects of baptism."<sup>60</sup>

In the sermon, *The New Birth*,<sup>61</sup> salvation through infant baptism is clearly

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<sup>55</sup> *Treatise on Baptism* (Jackson X, 188-201).

<sup>56</sup> *Treatise on Baptism* II. 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Treatise on Baptism* II. 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Treatise on Baptism* IV. 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Treatise on Baptism* IV. 2.

<sup>60</sup> *Treatise on Baptism* IV. 2.

<sup>61</sup> *The New Birth* (BE) 2:186-201.

marked out as an objective work of God but it does not involve regeneration. Wesley distinguished 'new birth' from baptism. He maintained his support for infant baptism in the statement, "our Church supposes that all who are baptised in their infancy are not at the same time born again. And it is allowed that the whole office for the baptism of infants proceeds upon this supposition."<sup>62</sup> For adults, though, Wesley stated in the same paragraph, "A man may possibly be 'born of water', and yet not be 'born of the Spirit'." He was referring to baptism in which a person is not inwardly changed.

John Wesley produced no statement comparable to Article XVII, *Of Predestination and Election*. Predestination was one of the great controversies of the Methodist revival and Wesley wrote quite extensively on the topic.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps he decided to try to avoid the controversy in America by not producing a statement in his *Articles of Religion*. Wesley rejected the Reformed position on election primarily because it led to unconditional reprobation.<sup>64</sup> Wesley argued that if a person held to the idea that God chooses who shall be saved, then it made sense that one should hold to the position that God chooses who will not be saved.<sup>65</sup> Wesley's position was based on the explanation that God lived in the eternal now, thus election is in the eternal present, not in an historical passage of time. He stated, "Now, God, to whom all things are present at once, who sees all eternity at one view, 'calleth the things that are not as though they were;' the things that are not yet as though they were now subsisting."<sup>66</sup> His position, rather than being reformulated upon a Christological

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<sup>62</sup> *The New Birth* IV. 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Predestination Calmly Considered* (Jackson X, 204-259); *A Dialogue Between a Predestinarian and His Friend* (Jackson X, 259-266); *Serious Thoughts upon the Perseverance of the Saints* (Jackson X, 284-298) are some of Wesley's essays related to the topic of predestination.

<sup>64</sup> *Predestination Calmly Considered* 19: "But unconditional election I cannot believe; not only because I cannot find it in Scripture, but also (to wave all other considerations) because it necessarily implies unconditional reprobation."

<sup>65</sup> *Predestination Calmly Considered* 9-12.

<sup>66</sup> *Predestination Calmly Considered* 18.



theology, was grounded in the philosophical considerations of God's life in eternity.

In a letter to John Newton<sup>67</sup> Wesley further clarified his position. Particular Election and Final Perseverance were relegated to 'opinion' rather than to 'essential Doctrine'. He told Newton that if one investigated the number of published sermons it would reveal what little effort he had used to turn the controversy into a public debate.<sup>68</sup> He then explained to Newton that he had never removed a Methodist preacher for holding to particular election or final perseverance. Some Methodist preachers had left over the controversy but they had left voluntarily. Then Wesley added that he had removed a few Methodist preachers but it was on moral grounds not because of their views on election or predestination.

As with the *BCP* Article XVII, there was also no Article XVIII, *Of Obtaining Eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ*. It would be possible to conclude that Wesley found this repetitious in light of other statements in his *Articles of Religion* for he clearly supported salvation as found only in Christ. While Christ is the source of salvation the Methodists were prepared to discuss whether faith in Christ was required for salvation to people who had not heard the gospel properly presented. The 1745 Methodist Conference debated the issue and the contents of the discussion were recorded by John, Charles and others reviewing the minutes. On the question whether there were exemptions to "a sense of God's pardoning love," Question 3 asked: "Is it indispensably necessary to final salvation? Suppose a Papist, or a Quaker; or, in general, among those who have never heard it preached?" The answer was: "Love hopeth all things. We know not how for any of these may fall under the case of

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<sup>67</sup> *Letter to John Newton*, May 14, 1765 (Telford IV, 296-300).

<sup>68</sup> It did become an intense public debate prior to 1770 but especially in 1770 and in the following years. For a full account of the controversy see Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 107-216.

invincible ignorance.”<sup>69</sup> The discussion then turned to the biblical account of Cornelius. Question 7 asked: “Have we duly considered the case of Cornelius? Was not he in the favour of God, when ‘his prayers and alms came up for a memorial before God:’ that is, before he believed in Christ?” The answer was: “It does seem that he was, in some degree.”<sup>70</sup>

Wesley’s Christological Article II repeated the doctrine of atonement from Article II of the *BCP* and Article XX, *Of the One Oblation of Christ Finished Upon the Cross* is again an exact repetition of Article XXI of the *BCP*, insignificant wording excepted.

John Wesley insisted throughout his life that he agreed with the doctrines of the Church of England but not all practice contained in the *BCP*. This appears to have been an acceptable attitude since the Church of England had a history from its beginning of attempted revision and criticism of the *BCP*. Some of these historic revisions and criticisms succeeded in creating change and some did not. John Wesley’s *Articles of Religion* were not a departure from the doctrine of salvation contained in the *Prayer Book* but they did contain a revised statement for a new audience gradually moving away from the authority of the Church of England.

### **C. John Wesley and the Three Offices of Christ: Prophet, Priest and King**

John Wesley’s theology of salvation was an attempt to integrate three biblical models:

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<sup>69</sup> *Minutes of Some Later Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesleys and Others*, Conversation II (Jackson VIII, 282).

<sup>70</sup> *Minutes of Some Later Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesleys and Others*, Conversation II (Jackson VIII, 283). This is also confirmed in his *ENNT*: Acts 10:35. John Wesley believed that Cornelius had been accepted by God prior to any knowledge of Christ. The acceptance by God was the basis for sending Peter to the home of Cornelius. Among Wesley’s opponents this sounded like salvation by merit although Wesley rejected the implication.

Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.<sup>71</sup> This means that in order to understand his complete doctrinal formulation a dissection of the three models is required. Yet the process of dissection may tend to obscure Wesley's attempt at a wholistic approach. John Wesley's aim was to construct a theology of salvation in which humanity was restored to the image of God. It was understood to be a complete recovery. This required a belief in the power of Christ to break the control that sin maintained over humanity and for this reason the doctrine of salvation took centre stage in Wesley's theology.

It was the grace of God that pervaded his thinking. This grace was revealed primarily in Jesus' death and resurrection, but even before a person was aware of such an act of God, God's grace was operative and effective. Salvation expressed the complete grace of God throughout a person's life, of this Wesley was certain.

An integral aspect of salvation was the atonement. The doctrine of the atonement set the agenda for understanding salvation. Thirteen years before his death, John Wesley wrote a letter to Mary Bishop in which he stated, "...nothing in the Christian system is of greater consequence than the doctrine of Atonement. It is properly the distinguishing point between Deism and Christianity...Give up the Atonement, and the Deists are agreed with us."<sup>72</sup> Yet Wesley wrote no specific treatise on the Atonement. His views on a doctrine which he regarded as integral to the definition of Christianity must be gleaned from his *Sermons, Explanatory Notes*

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<sup>71</sup> *The Law Established Through Faith, II*, I.6 (BE) 2: 37-38, "To preach Christ as a workman that needeth not to be shamed is to preach him not only as our great 'High Priest, taken from among men, and ordained for men, in things pertaining to God'; as such, 'reconciling us to God by his blood', and 'ever living to make intercession for us'; but likewise as the Prophet of the Lord, 'who of God is made unto us wisdom', who by his word and his Spirit 'is with us always', 'guiding us into all truth', yea, and as remaining a King for ever; as giving laws to all whom he has bought with his blood, as restoring those to the image of God whom he had first reinstated in his favour; as reigning in all believing hearts until he has 'subdued all things to himself'; until he hath utterly cast out all sin, and 'brought in everlasting righteousness.'"

<sup>72</sup> *Letter to Mary Bishop*, Feb. 7, 1778 (Telford 6, 298).



on the New Testament, Letters, the Journal, and various theological treatises. As John Wesley described the work of Christ from his interpretation of the biblical imagery of *Prophet, Priest, and King*, the ideas were connected together like an interlocking web.

It should be noted that the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest, and king was the particular model developed in western theology. The idea was not unknown in Eastern theology<sup>73</sup> but there was not an emphasis on this manner of speaking of Christ's work in the East. In western thought John Calvin was the primary developer of the three offices of Christ<sup>74</sup> and this was recognised within the Church of England. John Wesley's early reading of Bishop John Pearson certainly would have made him familiar with the western version of the model.<sup>75</sup>

To analyse Wesley's doctrine of atonement, within his overall understanding of salvation, means having a grasp of his overall picture and then proceeding to examine the pieces that create the whole picture. For John Wesley the atonement was the sole ground for justification and sanctification. As Harald Lindström correctly observed in his discussion on the importance of the Aldersgate experience on May 24, 1738 in Wesley's theological formulation, "Along with the new knowledge of justification in 1738, the Atonement, the rock on which justification is built, naturally comes to the fore."<sup>76</sup> Humanity and human works could not be the basis for

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<sup>73</sup> Eusebius described Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King in *The Church History of Eusebius* I. III. 8-21 (NPNF, Series 2, Vol. 1). Human prophets, priests, and kings were types of Christ. Eusebius stated, "And we have been told also that certain of the prophets themselves became, by the act of anointing, Christs in type, so that all these have reference to the true Christ, the divinely inspired and heavenly Word, who is the only priest of all, and the only King of every creature, and the Father's only supreme prophet of prophets" (*The Church History of Eusebius* I. III. 8, 86). He developed the idea in the section and then concluded by commenting, "I have of necessity prefaced my history with these matters in order that no one, judging from the date of his incarnation, may think that our Saviour and Lord Jesus, the Christ, has but recently come into being" (I. III. 21, 87).

<sup>74</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion* II. XV offered the introduction to the three offices of Christ.

<sup>75</sup> John Pearson, *Exposition of the Creed*, (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., 1683, 1854), 139-145.

<sup>76</sup> Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Sanctification*, reprint, (London: Epworth Press, 1946; Wilmore, Kentucky: Francis Asbury Press, n.d.), 56.

acceptance by God, and so the work of Christ could not be limited to a moral example which humanity was to follow.

The opening paragraph in the 'Preface' to the *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739) was an acknowledgement that both John and Charles Wesley once held to the schemata of salvation proposed by "the Mystic divines." John Wesley stated in his interpretation of the Mystics, "They speak largely and well against expecting to be accepted of God for our virtuous actions; and then teach, that we are to be accepted for our virtuous habits or tempers. Still the ground of our acceptance is placed in ourselves."<sup>77</sup> Wesley accused the Mystics of assuming that we are saved by our inward righteousness. Now he argued that this scheme had been put the wrong way around. He asserted, "The sole cause of our acceptance with God (or, that for the sake of which, on the account of which, we are accepted) is the righteousness and the death of Christ, who fulfilled God's law, and died in our stead."<sup>78</sup> Faith, in this context, is neither good works nor holiness but faith does result in good works and holiness.<sup>79</sup>

The question was, according to Wesley, what did Christ accomplish? To answer this it is required to place Wesley within the history of the development of this doctrine. There is a requirement to discover which scriptural and historic models influenced John Wesley and then determine how he developed the scriptural and historic models to create an overall doctrine of the atonement.

John Wesley accepted without reservation the imputation of Christ's passive righteousness to humanity. Importantly, Wesley recognised that Christ's righteousness, as effective for humanity, was directly related to the definition of

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<sup>77</sup> *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Preface 2 in *PW* Vol. 1, xix.

<sup>78</sup> *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Preface 2, xx.

<sup>79</sup> *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Preface 2, xx: "...faith, though necessarily producing both, yet not including either good works or holiness."

Christ's humanity. He stated, "Whoever believes the doctrine of imputation understands it chiefly, if not solely, of his human righteousness."<sup>80</sup> Christ's human righteousness was understood both through the internal righteousness of Christ and through Christ's outward actions. Christ's outward actions were a result of his inward righteousness. An important point is being asserted. The problem for humanity is an inward mindset. If Christ's actions were to be righteous then his mind or soul must be righteous. Wesley stated: "The *human righteousness* of Christ belongs to him in his human nature, as he is 'the mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ.' This is *internal* and *external*. His internal righteousness is the image of God stamped on every power and faculty of his soul."<sup>81</sup> It is now possible to understand that Wesley is concerned about the whole person, body and soul, and this is revealed in the humanity of Christ. It was, for Wesley, the effect of Christ's divine nature upon his human nature that created the righteousness of Christ.<sup>82</sup> He thus could assert that inwardly and outwardly Christ was sinless which was a negative statement but positively Christ fulfilled all righteousness.<sup>83</sup>

For Wesley, Christ and Adam fully represented humanity. Wesley could state this from a Christological standpoint: "My reason for believing he was so, in some sense is this; Christ was the representative of mankind, when God 'laid on him the iniquities of us all, and he was wounded for our transgressions.'"<sup>84</sup> This meant that

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<sup>80</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* I. 1 (BE) 1: 452.

<sup>81</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* I. 2: 452.

<sup>82</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* I. 2: 452: "It is a copy of his divine righteousness, as far as it can be imparted to a human spirit. It is a transcript of the divine purity, the divine justice, mercy, and truth."

<sup>83</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* I.3: 453: "It was the least part of his *external righteousness* that he did nothing amiss, that he knew no outward sin of any kind, 'neither was guile found in his mouth'; that he never spoke one improper word, nor did one improper action. Thus far it is only a *negative* righteousness...But even his outward righteousness was *positive* too...All he acted and spoke was exactly right in every circumstance. The whole and every part of his obedience was complete. 'He fulfilled all righteousness.'"

<sup>84</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Section VI, 'The Notion of Adam's Being a Federal Head or Representative of Mankind Considered' (Jackson, IX), 332.



since Adam was the representative, consequently all humanity faces death because of Adam. Adamic representation was defined as, “The state of all mankind did so far depend on Adam, that, by his fall, they all fall into sorrow, and pain, and death, spiritual and temporal.”<sup>85</sup> The corruption of the human nature precedes making choices in life, i.e., the exercise of the free will. The Adamic representative concept was only valid if Christ also represented humanity in receiving salvation. Wesley asked a rhetorical question which revealed the Christological interconnection with humanity, “But if Adam and Christ did not stand or fall, obey and suffer, for mankind, how can the death of others be the consequence of Adam’s offence; the life of others, the consequence of Christ’s obedience?”<sup>86</sup> Wesley accepted the idea that Adam was the representative human, thus in the Genesis account of the fall into sin what happened to Adam happens to all humanity.<sup>87</sup> To counter the effect of Adam’s fall and the consequent condemnation of humanity brought by that sin, Christ became, as Wesley stated, “another common head of mankind, a second general parent and representative of the whole human race.”<sup>88</sup>

The atonement was accomplished through Christ’s righteousness and made effective by his sacrificial death on the cross.<sup>89</sup> But the righteousness of Christ occurs in a person’s life at the point of belief. In this sense it is instantaneous. The righteousness of Christ is therefore ineffective for the unbeliever.<sup>90</sup> The sermon *The Lord Our Righteousness* was published as a defence from the attacks of the Calvinists against Wesley’s supposedly inadequate understanding of the righteousness of Christ

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<sup>85</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Section VI, ‘The Notion of Adam’s Being a Federal Head or Representative of Mankind Considered,’ 332.

<sup>86</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Section VI, ‘The Notion of Adam’s Being a Federal Head or Representative of Mankind Considered,’ 332.

<sup>87</sup> *Justification by Faith* I. 6 (BE) 1: 185.

<sup>88</sup> *Justification by Faith* I. 7: 186.

<sup>89</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* I. 4: 453.

<sup>90</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* II 1: 454.

in relation to human righteousness. In the debate with the Calvinists, Wesley had been accused of near 'popery' and so his sermon included an attack on the Roman Church.<sup>91</sup>

John Wesley asserted, "The righteousness of Christ is the whole and *sole foundation* of all our hope."<sup>92</sup> He repeatedly emphasised that the key to the imputation of Christ's righteousness was his humanity. He did this at the expense of misinterpreting the Council of Trent when he stated, "The human righteousness of Christ, at least the imputation of it as the whole and sole meritorious cause of the justification of a sinner before God, is likewise denied by the members of the Church of Rome - by all of them who are true to the principles of their own church."<sup>93</sup> That the Council of Trent did not deny the imputation of the human righteousness of Christ can be recognised in the Sixth Session, Chapter IV, VII, and XI.<sup>94</sup> Wesley did, though, recognise that there were many in the Roman Catholic Church who did accept that the imputation of Christ's righteousness was grounded in Christ's humanity.

The introductory comments in the sermon, *Salvation by Faith*, are repeated assertions that humanity is completely dependent on God's grace and there is nothing we can do to deserve God's grace.<sup>95</sup> This led to Wesley's belief that a person is incapable of doing anything to procure salvation. Wesley asked the question, and then provided the answer to the question, "Wherewithal then shall a sinful man atone for

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<sup>91</sup> A brief account of the controversy with the Calvinists, some of whom had been John Wesley's close friends, is given in the introduction to the sermon by Albert Outler (BE) 1: 444-446.

<sup>92</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* II. 13: 459.

<sup>93</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* II. 15: 460

<sup>94</sup> Council of Trent, Sixth Session (Jan. 13, 1547), Chapter IV, VII, and XI, in John Leith, *Creeds of the Church: A Reader in Christian Doctrine From the Bible to the Present*, rev. ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 409-410, 411-413, 414-416.

<sup>95</sup> *Salvation by Faith* proem. 1 (BE) 1: 118: "For there is nothing we are, or have, or do, which can deserve the least thing at God's hand."

any the least of his sins? With his own works? No. Were they ever so many or holy, they are not his own, but God's. But indeed they are all unholy and sinful themselves, so that every one of them needs a fresh atonement."<sup>96</sup> Wesley proceeded to clarify that humanity is corrupt and has nothing to bring to God to gain salvation. Only God's grace is sufficient for the salvation of humanity. Wesley's foundational idea regarding salvation was: "Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation."<sup>97</sup>

Faith, as a response, was outlined in this three-fold manner:

- i. The faith of a heathen which is a moral sense of right and wrong.<sup>98</sup>
- ii. The faith of a devil which is belief in God, in Christ as the Son of God, in the truth of scripture, yet is the enemy of God.<sup>99</sup>
- iii. The faith that becomes salvation is a faith that acknowledges 'the necessity and merit' of Christ's death and the power of Christ's resurrection. Christian faith is the reliance on Christ's death as the only effective means of salvation.<sup>100</sup>

Wesley went on to clarify the third type of faith:

a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life, as *given for us*, and *living in us*. It is a sure confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ *his* sins are forgiven, and he is reconciled to the favour of God; and in consequence hereof a closing with him and a cleaving to him as our 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption' or, in one word, our salvation.<sup>101</sup>

The sermon continued to explain the results of salvation by faith. It was a salvation,

"...from original and actual, past and present sin, of the flesh and of the spirit.

Through faith that is in him they are saved both from the guilt and from the power of it".<sup>102</sup> Salvation is freedom from the guilt and condemnation brought against

humanity. Through Christ a person is no longer declared guilty, nor is a person

imprisoned by the power of sin. All of this, Wesley asserted, was freely given through

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<sup>96</sup> *Salvation by Faith* proem. 2: 118.

<sup>97</sup> *Salvation by Faith* proem. 3: 118.

<sup>98</sup> *Salvation by Faith* I. 1: 119.

<sup>99</sup> *Salvation by Faith* I. 2: 119.

<sup>100</sup> *Salvation by Faith* I. 5: 121.

<sup>101</sup> *Salvation by Faith* I. 5: 121.

<sup>102</sup> *Salvation by Faith* II. 2: 122.



the atonement of Christ. Atonement, as Wesley stated, “implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment, by the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of the sinner now believing on him, and a deliverance from the power of sin, through Christ ‘formed in the flesh’.”<sup>103</sup>

There are two aspects of salvation that have saving consequences: justification and sanctification.<sup>104</sup> Both justification and sanctification are grounded in Christ and his accomplishment. Justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sin, and acceptance by God. The cause of justification is, in Wesley’s words, “the blood and righteousness of Christ, or (to express it a little more clearly) all that Christ hath done and suffered for us till ‘he poured out his soul for the transgressors’.”<sup>105</sup>

The restoration of humanity to the favour of God, or justification, was accomplished by the sacrifice of Christ. Here Wesley drew upon the *Book of Common Prayer* and the ‘Prayer of Consecration’ at the Communion Service; “And ‘by that one oblation of himself once offered’ he ‘hath redeemed me and all mankind’; having hereby ‘made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.’”<sup>106</sup> The *BCP* and the ‘Prayer of Consecration’ at the Communion read: “by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world...” The phrase in the Wesley quote, ‘hath redeemed me and all mankind’ is taken from ‘The Catechism’ in the *BCP*; this is repeated in the sermon, *The End of Christ’s Coming*,<sup>107</sup> where John Wesley used the *BCP* and its language of satisfaction. Here he stated, “when, having by that one oblation of himself once offered, made a full, perfect, and sufficient

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<sup>103</sup> *Salvation by Faith* II. 7: 124.

<sup>104</sup> *The Scripture Way of Salvation* I. 3 (BE) 2: 157.

<sup>105</sup> *The Scripture Way of Salvation* I. 4: 158.

<sup>106</sup> *Justification by Faith* I. 7: 186.

<sup>107</sup> *The End of Christ’s Coming* II. 6 (BE) 2: 480.

sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.” Wesley believed that Christ’s sacrifice cancelled God’s punishment of humanity and humanity was now to be restored to the fellowship of God.<sup>108</sup> Wesley’s summary statement was, “Even so by the sacrifice for sin made by the second Adam, as the representative of us all, God is so far reconciled to all the world that he hath given them a new covenant.”<sup>109</sup> His comment, “God is so far reconciled”, was a reference to the turning away of the wrath of God because of the death of Christ. Wesley later stated in this sermon, “It is that act of God the Father whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of His Son, he showed forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of sins that are past.”<sup>110</sup> Wesley proceeded to argue his familiar line that a person is not considered righteous,<sup>111</sup> nor was a person’s works considered righteous prior to justification.<sup>112</sup> The sacrifice of Christ meant that Christ had been punished in our place for our sin. Wesley described it in this manner: “But as ‘he made Christ to be sin for us’ (that is, treated him as a sinner, punished him for our sins), so he counteth us righteous from the time we believe in him (that is, he doth not punish us for our sins, yea, treats us as though we were guiltless and righteous).”<sup>113</sup>

John Wesley made it clear that the whole Gospel was to be preached. This he explained by stating, “It is part thus to ‘preach Christ’ by preaching all things whatsoever he hath revealed.”<sup>114</sup> He continued to assert the necessity of preaching conversion but then he stated, “But still we should not ‘preach Christ’ according to his word if we were wholly to confine ourselves to this.” Christ is to be preached

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<sup>108</sup> *Justification by Faith* I. 8 (BE) 1: 186.

<sup>109</sup> *Justification by Faith* I. 9: 187.

<sup>110</sup> *Justification by Faith* II. 5: 188.

<sup>111</sup> *Justification by Faith* III. 1: 190.

<sup>112</sup> *Justification by Faith* III. 6: 193.

<sup>113</sup> *Justification by Faith* IV. 5: 195.

<sup>114</sup> *The Law Established Through Faith*, II I. 6 (BE) 2: 37.

according to his offices.<sup>115</sup>

The three offices of Christ dealt with the whole of the plight of humanity. This was expressed in a two fold manner as justification and sanctification. From his comments on Matthew 11: 28 Wesley explained Christ's work of salvation: "And *I will give you rest* - I alone (For none else can) will freely give you (what you cannot purchase) rest from the guilt of sin by justification, and from the power of sin by sanctification."<sup>116</sup>

We can see within Wesley's understanding of the doctrine of the salvation that there is the three-fold office of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King which accomplishes a two-fold work for humanity in justification and sanctification. From his comments on the New Testament Wesley further confirmed that this is a consistent model for understanding the overall work of Christ:

Yea, I still account both all these and *all things* else to be mere *loss*, compared to the inward, experimental *knowledge of Christ*, as *my Lord*, as my prophet, priest, and king, as teaching me wisdom, atoning for my sins, and reigning in my heart. To refer this to justification only, is miserably to pervert the whole scope of the words. They manifestly relate to sanctification also; yea, to that chiefly.<sup>117</sup>

Wesley wrote *A Letter to a Roman Catholic* in an effort to create peace with Irish Roman Catholics intrigued by the Methodist movement. The letter was an attempt to end misinformation, prejudice, and uncalled for fear between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Wesley acknowledged in his opening comments that ill feeling existed from both sides. He began by identifying a 'true Protestant' with statements created along a creedal 'I believe' style. Wesley's second 'I believe'

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<sup>115</sup> *The Law Established Through Faith*, II I. 6: 37-38.

<sup>116</sup> *ENNT*: Matthew 11:28.

<sup>117</sup> *ENNT*: Philippians 3:8. It can be noted that this is common language for John Wesley. In the sermon, *The Law Established Through Faith*, II, I. 6, he made reference to Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King adding that none of the implications for salvation should be neglected in preaching.



statement outlined his understanding of salvation. The first paragraph read:

I believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Saviour of the world, the Messiah so long foretold; that, being anointed with the Holy Ghost, he was a *prophet*, revealing to us the whole will of God; that he was a *priest*, who gave himself as a sacrifice for sin, and still makes intercession for transgressors; that he is a *king*, who has all power in heaven and in earth, and will reign till he has subdued all things to himself.<sup>118</sup>

This formed an essential belief statement for Wesley and he asked the Roman Catholic readers: “If a man seriously believes thus much and practices accordingly, can any one possibly persuade you to think that such a man shall perish everlastingly?”<sup>119</sup>

John Wesley held to the belief in two covenants. The first covenant he called the covenant of works. This particular covenant was effective in Paradise, prior to the fall, and it meant that Adam and all his children were to “pay the *price* themselves,” and then receive all of God’s blessing.<sup>120</sup> After the fall into sin the covenant of grace was instituted which meant that humanity received the forgiveness of sin through belief in Christ who, “*paid the price for us*; who hath given himself a propitiation for our sins, for the sins of the whole world.”<sup>121</sup> The two covenant theology was part of the Westminster Confession, Chapter VII. The language of salvation was clearly the language of a debt that was to be paid. Wesley’s two covenant theology came directly from the *Westminster Confession*.

Wesley interpreted the two covenant theology to imply directly that faith in

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<sup>118</sup> *A Letter to a Roman Catholic* 7, JWO, 494.

<sup>119</sup> *A Letter to a Roman Catholic* 11, JWO, 496.

<sup>120</sup> *The Righteousness of Faith* I. 13 (BE) 1: 209.

<sup>121</sup> A brief summary of covenant theology has been developed by A.T.B. McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), 1-19. McGowan made the comment that there has been no published study on the development of federal, or covenant, theology, 16; ft. nt. 1. See also Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification: From 1500 to the Present Day*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 112-114. Robert Monk also recorded this historical development although he did it in relation to John Wesley in *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*, (London: Epworth Press, 1966), 96-106.

the atonement presupposes sin and where there is no sin there is no need for atonement. In quite strong language Wesley stated, “Consequently, as there was no need of an atonement before the fall, so there was no place for faith in that atonement; man being then pure from every stain of sin, holy as God is holy. But love even then filled his heart.”<sup>122</sup>

John Wesley then asserted that the covenant of grace was a free gift and required nothing from humanity to receive its benefits. Belief in God was the means of receiving the gift but it came as a result of God’s initiating work in us. Wesley stated, “but only to *believe* in him who for the sake of his Son and the propitiation which he hath made, ‘justifieth the ungodly that worketh not’, and ‘imputes his faith to him for righteousness’.”<sup>123</sup> Love existed prior to the Fall, yet, after the Fall faith was required because love had been distorted through sin. Faith’s purpose was to restore humanity to the love of God as originally intended.

A summary of John Wesley’s position on salvation can be discerned in his statements from the sermon, *Working Out Our Own Salvation*. In this sermon he stated, “First, we are to observe that great and important truth which ought never to be out of our remembrance. It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do his good pleasure.”<sup>124</sup> He then repeated this in another way, it meant that God’s salvation, “...removes all imagination of merit from man, and gives God the whole glory of his own work.”

In the sermon Wesley made clear that there was no Pelagian assumption within his understanding of salvation. Salvation is grounded in God’s “unmerited

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<sup>122</sup> *The Law Established through Faith*, II, II. 5 (BE) 2: 40.

<sup>123</sup> *The Righteousness of Faith* I. 8: 207.

<sup>124</sup> *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* I. 1 (BE) 3: 199-209.

mercy.”<sup>125</sup> It is God who initiates the act of salvation, and, both the inward and outward change that is the product.<sup>126</sup> He went on to state that justification meant that we are “saved from the guilt of sin” and restored to God’s image, while sanctification meant that we are “saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God.”<sup>127</sup>

It will become evident that in John Wesley’s formulation of salvation the starting point is the priestly work of Christ which primarily refers to justification which is prior to sanctification. Only when the priestly work is properly identified can the prophetic and kingly work be understood. As John Deschner stated, “Wesley prefers to start with the priestly office and move from there to the prophetic and kingly office.”<sup>128</sup> The order of organising the description of Christ’s work as Prophet, Priest, and King might not seem important yet the ordering of the offices for the analysis of John Wesley’s system does require some explanation. John Deschner’s early work on Wesley’s Christology left the priestly office until the last because he felt it was the foundation office. Deschner wanted to avoid leaving what he considered Wesley’s moralistic tendencies to the last. On the other hand, Kenneth Collins followed the traditional pattern of Prophet, Priest, and King especially as outlined by Emil Brunner in *The Mediator*.<sup>129</sup> Contrary to Deschner and Collins, Wesley’s concept of the priestly office will be analysed first since the priestly office determines the interpretation he gave to the prophetic and kingly offices.

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<sup>125</sup> *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* I. 1: 202.

<sup>126</sup> *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* I. 2: 202: “First, ‘to will’ may include the whole inward, ‘to do’ the whole outward religion...it implies that it is God that worketh both inward and outward holiness.”

<sup>127</sup> *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* II.1: 204.

<sup>128</sup> John Deschner, *Wesley’s Christology*, 78; also, “In the Priestly work of Christ, His sacrifice and intercession, the center of the Wesleyan Christology is reached. Here as nowhere else, the main themes of Wesley’s theology are unified and clarified,” 150; Harald Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, 72: “The characteristic expression of the idea of atonement lies in satisfaction.”

<sup>129</sup> Kenneth Collins, *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley’s Homiletical Theology*, (Wilmore, Kentucky: Heritage Press, 1993), 44; ft. nt. #3.



## PART TWO: John Wesley and the Doctrine of God

### I. John Wesley and the Trinity

#### A. The Centrality of Worship

John Wesley began his sermon, *Spiritual Worship*, by describing what he considered the apostle John's particular reason for composing his first epistle. The epistle began at the foundation of Christian theology which was expressed in worship, "the happy and holy communion which the faithful have with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."<sup>1</sup> Wesley divided the epistle into three organised trinitarian sections. Chapter 1: 5-10 relates to the communion with the Father, chapters 2-3 relate to communion with the Son, and chapter 4 deals with communion with the Spirit. Chapter 5 is concerned with the trinitarian witness to salvation and faith in Christ which includes obedience and victory.<sup>2</sup> It is possible to see that John Wesley centred his theology around the Trinity though his trinitarian theology was a traditional formulation and, as we shall see, it was set within the structure of Augustine's thought.

In his 1784 *Articles of Religion* sent to the Methodists in North America his statement on the Trinity was a replication of *Article I* in the *BCP*:

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Worship* proem 3 (BE) 3: 90.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritual Worship* proem 4: 90.

<sup>3</sup> *John Wesley's Sunday Service for the Methodists in North America*, (United Methodist Publishing House and the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1984), 306.

His comments in *The Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* support his later creedal statement. From his interpretation of I John 5:8 Wesley wrote:

Nothing can separate the Spirit from the Father and the Son. If he were not one with the Father and the Son, the apostle ought to have said, *The Father and the Word, who are one, and the Spirit, are two*. But this is contrary to the whole tenor of revelation. It remains that *these three are one*. They are one in essence, in knowledge, in will, and in their testimony.<sup>4</sup>

That this is centred around the concept of salvation is confirmed in his benediction in the sermon, *The Love of God*. The sermon concluded with: "Unto God the Father, who first loved us, and made us accepted in the Beloved; unto God the Son, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; unto God the Holy Ghost, who sheddeth the love of God abroad in our hearts, be all love and all glory for time and for eternity!"<sup>5</sup> The will of God is grounded here in a united love of the persons which is the basis of salvation for humanity. It is possible to understand that Wesley moved in the direction of the economic Trinity which he believed was the revealed 'fact'. The immanent Trinity, though he believed its truth, was mystery and needed not to demand our attention.

There is further support for his economic trinitarianism in Hebrews 9:14.

From this text we hear a lengthy description of the co-operative work of the trinitarian relations for the salvation of humanity:

*How much more shall the blood of Christ* - The merit of all his sufferings.  
*Who through the eternal Spirit* - The work of redemption being the work of the whole Trinity. Neither is the Second Person alone concerned even in the amazing condescension that was needful to complete it. The Father delivers up the kingdom to the Son; and the Holy Ghost becomes the gift of the Messiah, being, as it were, sent according to his good pleasure. *Offered himself* - Infinitely more precious than any created victim, and that *without spot to God*.  
*Purge our conscience* - Our inmost soul. *From dead works* - From all the

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<sup>4</sup> ENNT: I John 5:8. John Wesley accepted the textual accuracy of I John 5: 7-8, see comments on p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> *The Love of God* III. 8 (BE) 4: 345.

inward and outward works of the devil, which spring from spiritual death in the soul, and lead to death everlasting. *To serve the living God* - In the life of faith, in perfect love and spotless holiness.<sup>6</sup>

With this interpretation of Hebrews Wesley took a theological position against the second and third century trinitarian modalism by his insistence on distinguishing the Persons of the Trinity in eternity.

#### B. John Wesley and the Augustinian Trinitarian Theology

Since the 1960's, with Albert Outler's assessment of Wesley's dependency on the Eastern Fathers for his doctrine of salvation,<sup>7</sup> a debate has risen over Wesley's Eastern or Western theological direction. To offer any type of resolution to the debate it is important to lay a foundation for Wesley's doctrine of God. At this point, we can turn to Augustine since the following work demonstrates John Wesley's use of the Augustinian tradition.

Wesley's western approach to the Trinity is demonstrated in his use of the filioque clause discovered in his extended comments on John 15:26: "...his title as the *Spirit of truth*, together with his proceeding from the Father, can agree to none but a divine person. And that he proceeds from the Son, as well as from the Father, may be fairly argued from his being called, 'the Spirit of Christ,' I Peter i. 11; and from his being here said to be sent by Christ from the Father, as well as sent by the Father in his name."<sup>8</sup> Wesley offered no discussion on the importance of the filioque clause, it was assumed by him to be adequate for the trinitarian definition.

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<sup>6</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 9: 14.

<sup>7</sup> Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> ENNT: John 15:26.



In order to understand Wesley's trinitarian position it is necessary to begin where he accepted an epistemology of empirical knowledge and rejected the rationalism of the Deists. In, *On the Discoveries of Faith*, he asserted: "Some indeed have of late years endeavoured to prove that we have *innate ideas*, not derived from any of the senses, but coeval with the understanding. But this point has now been thoroughly discussed by men of the most eminent sense and learning."<sup>9</sup> One of the many sources for Wesley's developed empirical epistemology was Aristotle.<sup>10</sup> Wesley insisted that, "All knowledge which we naturally have is originally derived from our senses."<sup>11</sup>

Wesley then proceeded to explain that complete knowledge which includes the objective world known through the senses extends beyond the visible world to the invisible and spiritual world. At this point knowledge of the invisible and spiritual world is grounded not in the senses but in faith. The senses, according to Wesley, "furnish us with no information at all concerning the *invisible world*."<sup>12</sup> Faith then must be activated in order to complete human understanding. God, "hath appointed *faith* to supply the defect of sense;"<sup>13</sup> Wesley then concluded:

Sense is an evidence of things that are seen; of the visible, the material world, and the several parts of it. Faith, on the other hand, is the 'evidence of things not seen', of the *invisible world*; of all the 'invisible things which are revealed in the oracles of God.'<sup>14</sup>

On this basis he declared his knowledge of the Trinity. Such knowledge came by faith

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<sup>9</sup> *On the Discoveries of Faith* proem 1(BE) 4: 29.

<sup>10</sup> *On the Discoveries of Faith* proem 1:29: "There is nothing in the understanding which was not first perceived by some of the senses;" cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* III. 7, *De Anima (On the Soul)*, trans., Hugh Lawson-Tangred, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 207-209; cf. also Albert Outler's footnote 1 (BE) 4: 29.

<sup>11</sup> *On the Discoveries of Faith* proem 1: 29.

<sup>12</sup> *On the Discoveries of Faith* proem 3:30.

<sup>13</sup> *On the Discoveries of Faith* proem 4:30.

<sup>14</sup> *On the Discoveries of Faith* proem 4:30.

to humanity, and, as he stated, “By faith I know ‘there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit,’ and that ‘these three are one’.”<sup>15</sup>

This amounted to true wisdom, that is, the combination of faith and empirical knowledge. It defined Christian thought which, according to Wesley, was the highest form of wisdom. In a letter to Miss March he wrote: “And, indeed, no one can be termed thoroughly wise until he is altogether a Christian. To describe all our thoughts and actions to God, that is our highest wisdom; and so far we inwardly or outwardly swerve from this, we walk as fools, not as wise.”<sup>16</sup>

He described the work of the Trinity in the sermon, *On the Discoveries of Faith*; first, the Father was Governor and source then he continued to describe the Son and Spirit in the economic pattern of salvation:

‘the Word’, God the Son, ‘was made flesh’, lived and died for our salvation, rose again, ascended into heaven, and now sitteth at the right hand of the Father. By faith I know that the Holy Spirit is the giver of all spiritual life; of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; of holiness and happiness, by the restoration of the image of God wherein we are created.<sup>17</sup>

Wesley published only one specific trinitarian sermon, *On the Trinity*, and in commenting on the doctrine of the Trinity in Wesley’s theological thought Albert Outler stated, “There are, however, very few references to the doctrine, as such, in Wesley’s writings; this is his only extended comment on it. This suggests that for Wesley, as for pietists generally, abstruse doctrines are better believed devoutly than analysed rationally.”<sup>18</sup> It is true that Wesley never conceived of the Trinity as a rationally understood doctrine, yet it does appear that the doctrine was integral to his

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<sup>15</sup> *On the Discoveries of Faith* proem 7:31-32.

<sup>16</sup> *Letter to Miss March*, Aug. 3, 1771 (Telford V, 270-271).

<sup>17</sup> *On the Discoveries of Faith* proem 7:32.

<sup>18</sup> *On the Trinity* (BE) 2: 373.

thought. It permeated his theological writings and was not a neglected theme. Wesley did understand that true reason, or rational thought, was consistent with revelation. Knowledge of the Trinity then begins with revelation, that is, God's communication to humanity which is received by faith. He simply was not presenting a speculative account of its importance. Speculative work for Wesley was tantamount to irrelevancy. Outler's comment is valid but it can be misinterpreted without a full comprehension of Wesley's theological method. Barry Bryant's statement was more comprehensive when he wrote, "...it is my conclusion that the starting point for Wesley's understanding of the Christian system is the Triune God, particularly where his anthropology, soteriology, and understanding of worship are concerned."<sup>19</sup>

In his letter to Miss March he continued to explain the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. Only through the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is it possible to discover the ways of God. Here he challenged Bishop Peter Browne's language. Wesley's remark on the distinction between the 'fact' and 'manner' of the Trinity is clarified:

It is a striking remark of Bishop Browne's that we are not required to 'believe any mystery' in the matter. The mystery does not lie in the fact 'These Three are One,' but in the manner the accounting how they are one. But with this I have nothing to do. I believe the fact. As to the manner (wherein the whole mystery lies) I believe nothing about it. The quaint device of styling them three offices rather than persons gives up the whole doctrine.<sup>20</sup>

This is reiterated in his 1776 letter to Mary Bishop. He repeated his belief that the fact was a required doctrine but not the manner: "With regard to the Trinity, for instance, what am I required to believe? Not the *manner* wherein the mystery lies. This is not

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<sup>19</sup> Barry Bryant, *John Wesley's Doctrine of Sin*, PhD thesis, (London: University of London, 1992), 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Letter to Miss March*, Aug. 3, 1771: 270.



the object of my faith; but the plain *matter of fact*, 'These Three are One.' This I believe, and this only."<sup>21</sup>

Evidently Wesley believed it speculative to debate the immanent Trinity but it was important to know the economic Trinity. The immanent and economic Trinity was the 'fact' which Wesley was careful to assert but only the economic Trinity could be explained. This was reaffirmed thirteen years later in a letter to Mrs. Cock. Wesley presented a series of personal questions related to spirituality that revolved around the language of the economic Trinity. Some of the questions asked were: "Is your soul now as much alive as ever? Do you still find deep and uninterrupted communion with God, with the Three-One God, with the Father and the Son through the Spirit?"<sup>22</sup>

Wesley began his trinitarian sermon, *On the Trinity*, in a manner not unfamiliar to his pietist theology. The opening remarks laid a foundation for experiential theology in relation to the Trinity. Formal trinitarian language was not required and this he asserted in relation to certain Roman Catholic and Calvinist theologians. In both cases he did not question their Christian experience which was grounded in a doctrine of trinitarian theology. He acknowledged deep appreciation for the spirituality of Thomas à Kempis, the Spanish mystic Gregory Lopez, and the Roman Catholic ascetic, the Marquis de Renty. Yet Wesley clearly did not accept many of the Roman Catholic doctrines.<sup>23</sup> He then turned to attack the Calvinist position of absolute predestination with its implication of limited atonement expressed by Augustus Toplady.<sup>24</sup> In none of these does Wesley question their true

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<sup>21</sup> *Letter to Mary Bishop*, April 17, 1776 (Telford VI, 213).

<sup>22</sup> *Letter to Mrs. Cock*, Nov. 3, 1789 (Telford VIII, 183).

<sup>23</sup> *On the Trinity* proem 1: 374.

<sup>24</sup> *On the Trinity* proem 1:376.

Christianity despite what he may have considered erroneous opinions within their particular traditions.

This is important because John Wesley believed that the ‘fundamentals’ of Christianity might be determined by particular traditions and he had problems with who decided the fundamentals. He did believe, along with the classical statements of Christian belief, that the Trinity was a fundamental. The Trinity was also a key to spirituality and so he stated unequivocally:

But surely there are some which it nearly concerns us to know, as having a close connection with vital religion. And doubtless we may rank among these that contained in the words above cited: ‘These are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.’<sup>25</sup>

In the sermon, *On the Trinity*, this priest of the Church of England turned to support Jonathan Swift’s trinitarian sermon written against the rationalism of the day. Wesley was in line with Swift in the position that rationalism led to a misleading defence of the Trinity. Wesley added concerning Jonathan Swift’s work, “Herein he shows that all who endeavoured to explain it at all have utterly lost their way; have above all other persons hurt the cause which they intended to promote, having only, as Job speaks, ‘darkened counsel by words without knowledge’.”<sup>26</sup> Wesley proceeded to give support for the trinitarian direction of the Athanasian Creed without, as he described it, acceptance of its philosophical background: “I am far from saying, he who does not assent to this ‘shall without doubt perish everlastingly.’”<sup>27</sup>

The text for *On the Trinity* was I John 5: 7. He turned to a defence of the authenticity of the scripture verse despite the textual problems. It is possible to catch a

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<sup>25</sup> *On the Trinity* proem 2:376.

<sup>26</sup> *On the Trinity* proem 3: 377.

<sup>27</sup> *On the Trinity* proem 3: 377.

brief glimpse into Wesley's support for textual criticism as he discussed the verse. He accepted the position of his main source for New Testament work, John Albrecht Bengel, the German pietist, and concluded that the corruption of the verse came from fourth century Arian influence.<sup>28</sup> Following his acceptance of I John 5:7 he rejected the rationalist attempt to lessen the importance of the Trinity if, according to the Deist position, it could not be explained by rationalism. Wesley presented the case that people believe in many things that cannot be proven rationally and this is not absurd. On scientific grounds he argued for beliefs beyond proof.<sup>29</sup>

Wesley concluded that he accepted the epistemology expressed in revealed religion which was grounded in the views of Peter Browne.<sup>30</sup> This produced the cornerstone of vital religion. Wesley unequivocally asserted the centrality of trinitarian worship: "But the thing I here particularly mean is this: the knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion;"<sup>31</sup> yet, despite the required experiential theology in Wesley's thought, the Trinity was true regardless of one's experience. He could then conclude the sermon with this admonition:

Therefore I do not see how it is possible for any to have vital religion who denies that these three are one. And all my hope for them is, not that they will be saved during their unbelief (unless on the footing of honest heathens, upon the plea of invincible ignorance), but that God, before they go hence, will 'bring them to the knowledge of the truth'.<sup>32</sup>

Wesley found support for his doctrine of the Trinity in an obscure book written by William Jones of Nayland. He commented on this small trinitarian work by

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<sup>28</sup> *On the Trinity* proem 5: 378-379.

<sup>29</sup> *On the Trinity* proem 7: 379-383.

<sup>30</sup> *On the Trinity* proem 14-16: 383-384.

<sup>31</sup> *On the Trinity* proem 17: 385.

<sup>32</sup> *On the Trinity* proem 18: 386.



saying, “Mr. Jones’ book on the Trinity is both clear and more strong than any I ever saw on that subject. If anything is wanting, it is the application, lest it should appear to be a merely speculative doctrine, which has no influence on our hearts or lives; but this is so abundantly supplied by my brother’s *Hymns*.”<sup>33</sup>

William Jones’ work did not create a developed trinitarian doctrine, rather it was designed to be an anti-pluralist and anti-deist study.<sup>34</sup> One can discover the similarity of language between William Jones and John Wesley such as, “For the being of God is not an object of sight, but of faith.”<sup>35</sup> For Jones, to deny the Trinity was also to deny the classic doctrine of Christology, the atonement through satisfaction, and original sin.<sup>36</sup> The primary point of Jones was that the doctrine of the Trinity was grounded in scripture.<sup>37</sup> He divided his work into four sections: the divinity of Christ; the divinity of the Holy Spirit; the plurality of Persons; and, the Trinity in unity. His method was a simple one; scripture texts were amassed to support the Trinity with brief comments on each text. In total he produced one hundred scriptural texts. John Wesley made it clear, the doctrine of the Trinity needed an application to save it from irrelevant, dry speculation. To this he referred to his brother’s hymns.

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<sup>33</sup> *Letter to Mary Bishop*, April 17, 1776 (Telford VI, 213).

<sup>34</sup> William Jones, *The Catholic Doctrine of a Trinity: Proved by Above an Hundred Short and Clear Arguments, Expressed in the Terms of Holy Scripture*, new edition, (London: SPCK, 1830), iii.

<sup>35</sup> William Jones, iii.

<sup>36</sup> William Jones, iv-v.

<sup>37</sup> William Jones, xvii.

## C. John Wesley, The Image of God, and the Trinity

### 1. An Historical Survey

It has been suggested that John Wesley was innovative in his explanation of the image of God in humanity.<sup>38</sup> In this area he developed a model that reflected more of the trinitarian emphasis of Augustine but Wesley's contribution differed from Augustine. We will begin with a brief survey of Patristic writings that indicate a well worn path in which the image of God in humanity was understood within a Christological concept. This representative survey will include both Eastern and Western Patristic writers and these theologians were familiar to John Wesley.

Irenaeus spoke of the transformation that humanity must receive following the disobedience of Adam. The transformation would be the restoration of humanity to the image of God. In *Adversus Haeresus* this is made clear, "For in times long past, it was *said* that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] *shown*; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created."<sup>39</sup> Here we discover the Christological meaning of the image of God and it was a consistent interpretation in Irenaeus' writings.

Athanasius followed the same theological intention as Irenaeus. The Alexandrian Bishop insisted that humanity was distinct from creation in its particular knowledge and relationship to God. This was explained by the image of God. He wrote, "But, in fact, the good God has given them a share in His own Image, that is, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and has made even themselves after the same Image and

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<sup>38</sup> Barry Bryant, 150.

<sup>39</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haeresus* V. 16. 2, ANF, Vol. 1, reprint, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989).

Likeness.”<sup>40</sup> As with Irenaeus, the Christological meaning of ‘image’ retained the relationship between God the Creator and humanity.

The early Patristic tradition in the West followed a similar line. Tertullian in, *Against Praxeas*, defended the Trinity as one substance (substantia) in three persons (persona). At the point in the discussion regarding creation and humanity, Tertullian argued that humanity was created in the image of God. He then wrote, “But there was one in whose image he was making him, the Son’s in fact, who because he was to be the surer and truer man caused that man to be called his image who at that time had to be formed of clay, as the image and similitude of the true.”<sup>41</sup> A second western theologian, Hilary of Poitiers wrote, in the context of the unity and distinction of the Father and the Son, “Now nothing can be like God unless it have its source in Him: a perfect likeness can be reflected only from that which it represents; an accurate resemblance forbids the assumption of any element of difference. Disturb not this likeness; make no separation where truth shows no variance, for he Who said, *Let us make man after our image and likeness*, by those words *Our likeness* revealed the existence of Beings Each like the Other.”<sup>42</sup>

Finally we can turn to Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. In his, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, Ambrose insisted on the truth of the incarnation, the Word become humanity. He then wrote:

Therefore the Father hath said: ‘Let us make man in Our image and likeness.’ At the beginning of the universe itself, as I read, the Father and the Son existed, and I see one creation. I hear Him that speaketh, I acknowledge Him

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<sup>40</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 11, trans. Penelope Lawson, (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1946), 19; this subject is continued in *On the Incarnation* 12-14.

<sup>41</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 12, trans. Ernest Evans, (London: SPCK, 1948), 145.

<sup>42</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* III. 23, (NPNF, Vol. IX, Second Series), reprint, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983).



that doeth: That it is of one image, one likeness, that I read. This likeness belongs not to diversity but to unity. What, therefore, thou claimest for myself, thou takest from the Son of God, seeing, indeed, that thou canst not be in the image of God, save by the help of the image of God.<sup>43</sup>

After Ambrose, Augustine became the major influence on theology in the West and introduced the trinitarian model for humanity, as distinct from the previous Christological models.

Augustine's position can be briefly stated. In *The City of God Against the Pagans*, he wrote, "And we indeed recognise in ourselves the image of God: that is, of the supreme Trinity."<sup>44</sup> This is further explained on the basis of love within God. But humanity can love both good and evil, yet, both loves are genuine: "For it is not he who knows what is good who is justly called a good man, but he who loves it...For there is also a love by which that is loved which ought not to be loved." He then moved to the point, "...it is good for a man that the love by which we live well should grow, and that the other, by which we live ill, should decrease, until the whole of our life is perfectly healed and transformed into good."<sup>45</sup> Though we shall note that John Wesley also used the Trinity as the image of God, he did not develop it on the basis of Augustine's Mind: memory, understanding, and will model, but he did use the concept of love within God as did Augustine.

Before we turn to the eighteenth century and John Wesley's explanation of the image of God, we shall make a few comments on the sixteenth century Reformation theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Martin Luther assessed Augustine's

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<sup>43</sup> Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* I. VII. 53, (NPNF, Vol. X, Second Series), reprint, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 209.

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* XI. 26, trans., R.W. Dyson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 483; also, *On the Trinity* XIV. 25 (LCC, 123): "we must believe that man was made in the image of the Trinity."

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, 487; this is also explained in *On the Trinity* X and XIV.

trinitarian model for humanity and found it less than adequate. He concluded, “they contribute little toward the correct explanation of the image of God.”<sup>46</sup> Luther’s proposal moved in quite a different direction. Because of sin the original image of God was so distorted and marred that we will not be able to know what it originally was. Luther remained quite agnostic about the subject. He stated, “However, through sin this image was so obscured and corrupted that we cannot grasp it even with our intellect.”<sup>47</sup>

John Calvin, like Luther, rejected Augustine’s trinitarian model,<sup>48</sup> but Calvin was more positive about the image of God in humanity than Luther. For Calvin the soul was intellect, that is, it had the ability to “discern good from evil,” and, it was also, will, which is being, “perfectly submissive to reason.”<sup>49</sup> Originally there was soundness of mind and freedom of will to choose the good<sup>50</sup> but humanity, for an unknown reason was not given perseverance. This is affirmed in his commentary on Genesis. Augustine is again rejected and the image of God became the proper alignment of body and mind. Calvin wrote, “In the mind perfect intelligence flourished and reigned, uprightness attended as its companion, and all the senses were prepared and moulded for due obedience to reason; and in the body there was a suitable correspondence with this internal order.”<sup>51</sup> He then rejected the Christological interpretation of the image of God by adding, “...the words of Moses do not bear the

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<sup>46</sup> Martin Luther, *Lecturers on Genesis, Chapters 1-5*, trans., George V. Shick, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 1, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 60.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Luther, 65.

<sup>48</sup> *Institutes* I. XV. 4: “For there is no solidity in Augustine’s speculation that the soul is a mirror of the Trinity;” both Luther and Calvin attributed Augustine’s use of the Mind: memory, understanding, and will to Aristotle.

<sup>49</sup> *Institutes* I. XV. 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Institutes* I. XV. 8

<sup>51</sup> John Calvin, *Genesis*, trans. John King, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1554, 1975), 95.

interpretation that ‘in the image’ means ‘in Christ.’”

A final comment can be made regarding an authoritative directional tendency in the Church of England. Herbert McGonigle summarised the importance of Richard Hooker with the comment, “It could almost be said that Richard Hooker established Anglican theology,”<sup>52</sup> Importantly Richard Hooker defined humanity in his hierarchical structure of creation as created below the angels but endowed with goodness and knowledge and these required growth.<sup>53</sup> We can now begin to relate John Wesley’s concept of the image of God in humanity in relation to the previous development in historical theology.

## 2. John Wesley and the Image of God

In John Wesley’s first sermon preached at St. Mary’s, Oxford University, he took as his topic the image of God in humanity.<sup>54</sup> It appears that he followed an acceptable pattern of using the Cambridge Platonists, particularly John Norris, in composing the sermon.<sup>55</sup> The idea that humanity was in the image of God, not particularly in the image of Christ, was developed early in Wesley and the idea remained with him throughout his life’s work. The Oxford don asserted that humanity was a relational and rational being. This, once again, struck against the Enlightenment’s tendency to see humanity as individualistic. As Wesley explained, “His affections were rational, even, and regular - if we may be allowed to say, ‘affections’, for properly speaking he

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<sup>52</sup> Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley’s Evangelical Arminianism*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 70.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity* Book I. V, *Works*, Vol. 1, arranged, John Keble, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., R.W. Church and F. Paget, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 215-216.

<sup>54</sup> *The Image of God* (BE) 4: 290-303.

<sup>55</sup> Albert Outler, (BE) 4: 290.



had but one: man was what God is, Love. Love filled the whole expansion of his soul; it possessed him without a rival. Every movement of his heart was love: it knew no other fervour. Love was his vital heart; it was the genial warmth that animated his whole frame.”<sup>56</sup>

Years later he would extend the idea of the image of God by describing humanity as consisting of three original interrelated images. There was the:

1. Natural image - This referred to “his own immortality, a spiritual being endued with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections;”
2. Political image - This referred to humanity’s sovereignty over creation, humanity was the “governor of this lower world;”
3. Moral image - Briefly stated, the moral image was humanity’s “righteousness and true holiness.”<sup>57</sup>

It should be emphasised that there is no Christological emphasis here but an emphasis on God within a three part human structure. This procedure of explaining the image of God used by Wesley is further elucidated in his *Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*. From Genesis 1: 26 he explicitly commented:

1. “In his nature” - “The soul is a spirit, an intelligent immortal spirit, an active spirit, herein resembling God, the Father of spirits, and the soul of the world.”
2. “let him have dominion” - “As he has the government of the inferior creatures, he is as it were God’s representative on earth. Yet his government of himself by the *freedom of his will*, has in it more of God’s image, than his government of the

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<sup>56</sup> *The Image of God* I. 2: 294-295.

<sup>57</sup> *The New Birth* I. 1 (BE) 2: 188; these ideas are repeated in various ways in *On Perfection* I. 7 (BE) 3:75; *The One Thing Needful* II. 2 (BE) 4: 355: “But love is the very image of God.” To a lesser degree the image of God was supported in *What Is Man?* II. 6 (BE) 3: 460; *On the Fall of Man* II. 5 (BE) 2: 409.

creatures.”

3. “*purity and rectitude*” - “God’s image upon man consists in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness.” This was the moral image.<sup>58</sup>

There was a contemporary of John Wesley that produced a similar system of three categories for the image of God in humanity. Isaac Watts had written in 1740 his, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, It was not as clear in Watts that this was a trinitarian model but the categories were the same. He defined humanity in these images and powers:

1. Natural powers - “to bear his Maker’s nearest likeness and authority;” this pertained to knowledge, reason, judgment, and immortality;
2. Moral perfection - “...an inward inclination to please and honour that God had made him, a supreme love to his Creator, and a zeal and desire to serve him, a holy fear of offending him, with a readiness to do all his will;” this is “the noblest part of that *image of God*, that is, his moral image.”
3. “Political image” - “his being made lord and governor over all the lower creation.”<sup>59</sup>

It is clear that though Wesley used the doctrine of God to define the image of God in humanity, he did not follow Augustine’s particular trinitarian approach. There does not appear to be a dependency here other than to emphasise an understanding of love (this is not contained in Isaac Watts) and to ignore the traditional Christological emphasis in the Eastern and Western Patristic work. Wesley’s approach is aligned

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<sup>58</sup> *Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*, Genesis 1:26, Vol. 1, reprint, (Bristol: William Pine, 1765; Salem, Ohio: Schmull Publishers, 1975).

<sup>59</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, in *The Works of Isaac Watts*, Vol. 6, (London: John Barfield, 1753, 1810), 57-59.

with his doctrine of salvation and the idea that love is the central concept of the essence of God. For Wesley it was God's love that bound the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together and it was this love that most adequately defined the three images of intelligence, governance, and morality that bound the human person into wholeness.

#### E. Conclusion

John Wesley worked from a theological position of economic trinitarianism. His theological language protected him from the two errors opposed to classical trinitarianism, that of Sabellianism and tritheism. He agreed with the classic Christian tradition that God is a unity of will and activity while distinct in Persons. It was the economic trinitarian approach that clarified the distinction of the Persons. The Father is the Source of the sending of the Son and Spirit; the Son made the atoning sacrifice, and the Spirit instils the work of the atonement in the believer's life. This grounded the doctrine of the Trinity in worship and spirituality.

Economic trinitarian theology is directed toward explaining the salvation of humanity but the refusal was the experiential evidence of humanity's corruption. Despite humanity's refusal of God, God is still a God of love and grace and humanity's refusal does not call into question God's love. The refusal calls into question humanity's ability to properly choose God's offer of salvation until humanity is aided by God. That is the key to his particular explanation of economic trinitarian thought. From the trinitarian foundation we can proceed to the explanation of the Person of Christ and discover how John Wesley defined Christ in order to establish his position on salvation.



## II. John Wesley and the Person of Christ

### A. Introduction

The classic study on John Wesley's Christology was the work published by John Deschner.<sup>1</sup> Deschner's work was based on the earlier study of David Lerch, *Heil und Heiligung bei John Wesley*<sup>2</sup> and since Deschner insisted that John Wesley's theology was grounded in Christology he stated, "Wesley's uniqueness in the England of his day lies in his fidelity to the Christological presupposition of his message."<sup>3</sup> Like his doctrine of the atonement the difficulty in an analysis of Wesley's Christology is that he never wrote a theological treatise on the subject. What is available to us comes by way of his sermons, essays, and *Notes* which appear like pieces of a puzzle that must be placed in a correct order to arrive at the picture that is accurate to John Wesley.

From the eastern tradition grounded in Irenaeus to the western theological tradition, the humanity of Christ has been the decisive focal point in Christology. Defining the humanity of Christ is crucial to the eventual understanding of the atonement and salvation. To this topic we can turn first in dealing with John Wesley's Christology. Deschner concluded that Wesley de-emphasised Christ's humanity and this became a common opinion in Wesley studies. According to Deschner, John 11:33-35, in Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament*, was an example of this.<sup>4</sup> Deschner stated, "Nevertheless, it is just when this assertion of a whole manhood is taken seriously that certain omissions are noticeable, and perhaps significant. There is a tendency to limit Christ's human emotions." Then Deschner quoted from the *Notes on the New Testament*, "the affections of Jesus were not properly passions, but

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<sup>1</sup> John Deschner, *John Wesley's Christology*, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> David Lerch, *Heil und Heiligung bei John Wesley* (Zurich: Christliche Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1947).

<sup>3</sup> Deschner, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Deschner, 24-25.

voluntary emotions which were wholly in His own power.” Deschner continued to add, “He wept ‘out of sympathy with those who were in tears all around Him, as well as from a deep sense of the misery sin had brought upon human nature’.” Yet it will be maintained in the following work, and in John 11:33-35, that Wesley was asserting a particular view on the full humanity of Jesus, not de-emphasising his humanity. This was Wesley’s consistent pattern which was based on John 1:14, that Christ took human flesh in the Incarnation.

Deschner was certain that John Wesley diminished the full humanity of Jesus and this interpretation tended to turn Wesley in an Apollinarian direction.<sup>5</sup> It is required, then, to explain the origins of Wesley’s Christology which took a basic form of the Alexandrian Christology of Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers but is not distinct from the classical Western Christological development. An assessment of the Alexandrian Christology in the Athanasian mode as distinct from the Alexandrian Christology of Apollinarius or the specific wording of ‘one nature’ of Cyril of Alexandria will be required.

Despite Deschner’s earlier work on Wesley’s Christology recent doctrinal studies on Wesley have ignored the Christological question. A sample collection of the plethora of books on John Wesley’s theology reveals this minimalism in interpreting his understanding of the Person of Christ. Whether one begins with George Croft Cell’s publication of 1935, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*,<sup>6</sup> or Colin Williams’ 1960 publication, *John Wesley’s Theology Today*,<sup>7</sup> or to the recent work by Theodore Runyan, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today*,<sup>8</sup> there is noticeable neglect of a critical analysis regarding Wesley’s work on the person of Christ. It appears to be an assumed doctrine rather than a

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<sup>5</sup> Deschner defended Wesley against the charge of Nestorianism, 30.

<sup>6</sup> George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*. (New York: Henry, Holt and Co., 1935).

<sup>7</sup> Colin Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960).

<sup>8</sup> Theodore Runyan, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

critically examined doctrine. A step forward has been made by Thomas Oden's *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*<sup>9</sup> and Kenneth Collins', *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley's Homiletical Theology*.<sup>10</sup> But, while these books provide invaluable information for a study on Wesley, they are not critical studies, therefore, further analysis of the person of Christ according to John Wesley is needed. This section of the dissertation is intended to offer a further contribution to such important work.

The following analysis on the Person of Christ will attempt to explore the Alexandrian Christology of the fourth century and this will create a basis for reading John Wesley. It has been over forty years since Deschner published his seminal work yet since then Wesley studies have made a great leap forward in the Oxford/Abingdon critical edition of the works of John Wesley. This critical edition needs to be taken into consideration, along with the contribution that hymnology made to understanding Christology.

## B. Alexandrian Christology

The great theological debate that occupied the fourth to the mid-fifth century revolved around the definition of the Person of Christ. Though the Council of Nicaea had established a creedal statement on the Person of Christ, the Christological struggle had only begun. From Nicaea (325) to Constantinople (381), Christology was at the centre of theological controversy and this would eventually include the doctrine of the Holy Spirit whose identity, in creedal form, was based on the Christological debate. It was not until the Council of Chalcedon concluded in 451 AD that the Christological doctrine was defined in

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Collins, *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley's Homiletical Theology*. (Wilmore, Kentucky: Wesley Heritage Press, 1993).



terms of the one Person, two Natures formula.

### 1. Athanasius

A review of Christology in the fourth century is an exhaustive and continual exercise. To limit such a study to Athanasius does not become easier since the interpretation of Athanasian Christology is controversial. But sufficient material can be included in this section to indicate not only Athanasius' position but also the declared heretical positions within the fourth century. Analysis of Arius, Apollinarius, and Nestorius cannot be neglected as all these theological positions have implications for an assessment of John Wesley's Christology.

Athanasius took up the prolonged fight against Arian theology since the Arians had defined Jesus in creaturely terms. According to the Arians, Jesus was the highest of God's creatures and therefore acted as an mediator between God and humanity. According to Arian theology, Christ was not essentially human but a creation of God. This meant that Christ would not have a human soul since Christ was not human. Khaled Anatolios has ably defended this view against the earlier work of Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh in *Arianism: A View of Salvation*.<sup>11</sup> Gregg and Groh had insisted that Arian theology had created a Jesus who was human as we are.

Athanasius countered the Arian theology with the Nicean 'homousion' theology in which Jesus was the real expression of God's condescension into human life in order to procure humanity's salvation. Jesus, who was fully divine, had acted in our place and on our

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<sup>11</sup> Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherency of His Thought*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 169; see also Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, (London: SCM Press, 1987), 98.

behalf as a fully representative human. Athanasius insisted on a fully human Jesus in order that his vicarious priestly role should become actual. His early *Statement of Faith* <sup>12</sup> recorded, “He had descended from the bosom of the Father, took from the undefiled Virgin Mary our humanity...In which humanity He was crucified and died for us, and rose from the dead, and was taken up into the heavens, having been created as the beginning of ways for us.” This is repeated throughout the document.<sup>13</sup> In other words, Christ had become human in order to save sinful and corrupted humanity.

Athanasius placed his Incarnational theology against the prevailing middle Platonism of his day. Middle Platonism stressed the gulf between Spirit and the material, or, between God and creation. Within this philosophical framework the full Incarnation would be a contradiction; the divine could not become human. Athanasius recognised the distinction between the divine and the material but insisted that the gulf could be bridged. The basic operative theological concern centred around soteriological doctrine. If salvation was to be actual for humanity then the divine essence would need to take human form.

Athanasius stated, “He became man and did not come into man. He did not enter into a human being,”<sup>14</sup> and then went on to assert that if the Son had only entered into a human being there would have been nothing extraordinary about that. Athanasius continued to explain the purpose of God’s condescension:

The purpose of this was to demonstrate and to bring all to believe that although he is always God, and sanctified those for whom he has become present, and orders everything in accordance with the Father’s will, in the end and on our account he became a human being, and ‘the Godhead dwelt bodily’, as the apostle says, in the

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<sup>12</sup> *Statement of Faith* 1, (NPNF, Vol. IV, Second Series), 84.

<sup>13</sup> “However the body which He wore for our sakes is a creature,” *Statement of Faith* 3, 85; “Accordingly that body is a thing made and created, which the Lord bore for us, which was begotten for us,” *Statement of Faith* 4, 85.

<sup>14</sup> *Orations Against the Arians* III. XXVI. 30, (NPNF, Vol. IV, Second Series), 410.

flesh. This amounts to saying, 'Being God, he had his own body, and using this as an instrument, he became a human being on our account.'<sup>15</sup>

He continued to assert:

For this reason the things proper to this flesh are said to belong to him because he was in it-such things as being hungry, being thirsty, suffering, getting tired, and the like, to which the flesh is susceptible. But the proper works of the Logos himself, such as raising the dead and making the blind see and healing the woman with a haemorrhage, he accomplished through the instrument of his own body. Furthermore, the Logos bore the weaknesses of the flesh as his own since the flesh belonged to him, while the flesh renders assistance in the works of the Godhead, since the Godhead came to be within it, for it was God's body.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, however, he bore our weaknesses and 'he himself bore our sins', in order to show that he became a human being on our account and that the body which bore him is his very own. And he himself was in no way harmed as he 'bore our sins in his body on the tree' to use Peter's words.<sup>17</sup>

Athanasius rejected any reference to a docetic type of theology. Even as Jesus performed miracles, it was a combination of human and divine action, for Jesus' body was not "in appearance" but reality.<sup>18</sup>

Athanasius argued in *On the Incarnation*<sup>19</sup> that God was the Creator and good, it was therefore inconceivable that corruption and death would have the ultimate victory. God would provide salvation for creation. The action of God took the form of a movement downwards from heaven, that is, a condescension. This would solve the problem that had been created by humanity. As Athanasius put it, "...nothing in creation had erred from the path of God's purpose for it, save only man."<sup>20</sup> The rest of creation had not strayed from the will of God. Thus, God did not descend to dazzle humanity but to heal the corruption of humanity. It is then that Athanasius could explain that God would,

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<sup>15</sup> *Orations Against the Arians* III. XXVI. 31, 410.

<sup>16</sup> *Orations Against the Arians* III. XXVI. 31, 410.

<sup>17</sup> *Orations Against the Arians* III. XXVI. 31, 411.

<sup>18</sup> *Orations Against the Arians* III. XXVI. 32, 411.

<sup>19</sup> *On the Incarnation* 6, trans., Penelope Lawson, (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1946), 12.

<sup>20</sup> *On the Incarnation* 43, 68.



take to himself for instrument a part of the whole, namely a human body, and enters into that. Thus He ensured that man should recognise Him in the part who could not do so in the whole, and that those who could not lift their eyes to His unseen power might recognise and behold Him in the likeness of themselves. For, being human, they would naturally learn to know the Father more quickly and directly by means of a body that corresponded to their own and by the Divine works done through it; for by comparing His works with their own they would judge His to be not human but Divine. And if, as they say, it were unsuitable for the Word to reveal Himself through bodily acts, it would be equally so for Him to do so through the works of the universe. His being in creation does not mean that He shares its nature; on the contrary, all created things partake of His power. Similarly, though He used the body as His instrument, He showed nothing of its defeat, but rather sanctified it by His indwelling.<sup>21</sup>

The problem was that living within the human body, humanity had fallen.

Athanasius' incarnational theology intended to resolve that problem. He insisted, "Naturally, therefore, the Saviour assumed a body for Himself, in order that the body, being interwoven, as it were with life, should no longer remain a mortal thing, in thrall to death, but as endued with immortality and risen from the dead, should henceforth remain immortal."<sup>22</sup> Then Athanasius was able to conclude, along with Irenaeus, that humanity could experience the meaning of new creation. As he stated, "He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God. He manifested Himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father. He endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality."<sup>23</sup> It was the Logos that preserved the sanctity of the human nature in Christ. The healing of humanity's corruption was demonstrated in the sanctity of Jesus' human nature by being joined with the Logos.

The doctrine of the Incarnation, in classical thought, understood that the complete humanity of Christ played a key and necessary role in order to establish a complete doctrine

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<sup>21</sup> *On the Incarnation* 43, 69.

<sup>22</sup> *On the Incarnation* 44, 71.

<sup>23</sup> *On the Incarnation* 54, 86.

of salvation for humanity. Yet the passages quoted from Athanasius indicated that his emphasis was on the 'body' of Jesus. It is the idea that Jesus needs to be more than a body that has created the controversy in interpreting the concept of the humanity of Jesus in Athanasius' theology. The place of the human mind, or soul, along with the body, in Jesus is the critical point of controversy. It was not that Jesus did not have a human mind according to Athanasius, the critical issue was, how important was the human mind of Jesus in the thought of Athanasius? Since Athanasius accepted this position the question is, how well did his theology defend the complete humanity in Jesus? To this question the various interpretations of the completeness of Jesus' humanity in terms of the atonement can be found. It is intended, at this point, to create the foundation for assessing John Wesley's doctrine of the Person of Christ.

## 2. The Interpretation of the Christology of Athanasius

Aloys Grillmeier presented a persuasive argument that though Athanasius accepted the idea that Christ has a human soul it played no part in his theological development. He stated. "It is probably undeniable that in his picture of Christ the soul of Christ retreats well into the background, even if it does not disappear completely."<sup>24</sup> Grillmeier argued that the Logos is the subject of Christ's bodily life and the physical source of all Christ's actions.<sup>25</sup> There is in the system, according to Grillmeier, no theological requirement for a human soul in Christ.<sup>26</sup> This developed argument is continued using the works of Athanasius to defend the position.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*. Vol. 1, rev. ed., (London: A.R. Mowbray Co., Ltd., 1975), 308; cf. also p. 317.

<sup>25</sup> Grillmeier, 312.

<sup>26</sup> Previous support for this proposal had been developed by Marcel Richard, 'Saint Athanase et la Psychologie du Christ salons les Ariens,' *Melanges de Science Religieuse* 4 (1947): 5-53; also, J. Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'Homme dans le Theologie d'Athanase d'Alexandrie*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill), 1977.

<sup>27</sup> Grillmeier, 308-328.

R.P.C. Hanson took up the same theological interpretation as Rolandus and Grillmeier and concluded that the Athanasian system renders the doctrine of the atonement unnecessary.

Hanson asserted in a devastating critique of Athanasius, "...we must conclude that whatever else the Logos incarnate is in Athanasius' account of him, he is not a human being."<sup>28</sup>

T. F. Torrance is representative of another approach to Athanasian Christology and therefore to orthodox Alexandrian Christology. Torrance offered this interpretation of Athanasius:

Athanasius came out very strongly for the completeness and the full reality of our Lord's humanity (cf. κυριακος ανθρωπος). The dominant interest was again soteriological, for it was not for his own sake but for our sakes that the Son of God became man. He became man in order to redeem and renew the *whole man*. Hence when we think of the Son or the Word as becoming flesh, he argued, we must include under that term all our human affections proper to human nature, including weakness, anxiety, agitation, passion, ignorance, as well as the sentient characteristics of human beings, for the purpose of the economic condescension was to renew the whole man, not least his *mind*, in Christ. Thus in passage after passage in his controversy with the Arians he insisted on taking seriously the complete *humanness* of Christ, for otherwise the work 'for our sakes', 'on our behalf' and 'in our place' was meaningless.<sup>29</sup>

Torrance's repeated emphasis is that Athanasius constantly referred to the necessity of the complete humanity in Christ. He appealed to statements Athanasius made which indicated that the 'soul' of Christ was not peripheral to his Christology but integral to full Christological development.<sup>30</sup>

Khaled Anatolios gave another response to the debate in which he attempted to return to the historical context of the Alexandrian theology. Anatolios wrote to indicate that Athanasius has been analysed in a piece-meal manner without an integrated theme to

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<sup>28</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381 AD*, 451. In a less assertive, but similar manner, see Alvyn Petterson, *Athanasius*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 109.

<sup>29</sup> T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 152.

<sup>30</sup> For the full essay see T. F. Torrance, 215-266.



interpret his work. He understood Athanasius to be working within an Irenaeus model with an integration of the transcendence and immanence of God in relation to creation. Particularly the controversy over the humanity of Jesus is highlighted since there has been a failure to understand that his doctrine of humanity centres on humanity as a receptacle of divine life rather than as an active agency.<sup>31</sup> He found additional support in Frances Young. Young described the characteristic of Alexandrian Christology in terms of receptivity rather than moral initiative.<sup>32</sup> Anatolios then concluded, "In other words, my contention is that Christ's humanity was a significant theological factor in Athanasius' perspective, even if he was not able to integrate Christ's human soul into that perspective."<sup>33</sup> It was Christ's human receptivity of the divine that is the significant contribution of Alexandrian Christology to soteriology.

To further develop this idea Anatolios went on to explain how the human person functions. The νοῦς is that part of humanity that relates to God; ψυχή is that part of humanity that relates to the body; σῶμα relates to the self-determination of νοῦς, a derivative describing whether the person is oriented toward God or not. It is the σῶμα that is closest to what is humanity and its direction is determined by νοῦς.<sup>34</sup> Sin has broken the relationship between God and humanity yet it is not within humanity to repair the brokenness. The initiative lies with God because the relationship has always been grounded in God's initiative since creation.

Anatolios acknowledged the limitation of Athanasius' analytic development of the human soul in Christ. Although much criticism of Athanasius is based on an intrusion of

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<sup>31</sup> Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Frances Young, 'A Reconsideration of Alexandrian Christology,' *TJEH* 22 (April 1971): 103-114.

<sup>33</sup> Anatolios, 'The Soteriological Significance of Christ's Humanity in Athanasius,' *SVTQ* 40:4, 268.

<sup>34</sup> This is described in detail in Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 61-64.

categories foreign to Athanasius, the Bishop still did not sufficiently establish clarity on the human soul of Christ. Yet Anatolios finally commented:

However, his emphasis on the internality of the relation between God and creation logically requires that he makes the redemption of the soul as well as the body derivative of the act whereby the power of the Word became 'internal' to the whole human structure, body and soul. In the same way that this power can only be internal to the human body by Christ's appropriating a human body, it can only be internal to the human soul through Christ's appropriating a human soul.<sup>35</sup>

Athanasius, according to Anatolios, set up the theological structure to reach this theological conclusion.

### 3. The Cappadocian Fathers

The Cappadocian Fathers developed their Christological formulation along similar lines to Athanasius. Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea, was the leader of this group of Alexandrian theologians and he asserted that the full humanity of Jesus was necessary for human salvation. In *Letter CCLXI* he commented:

It is the property of flesh to undergo division, diminution, dissolution; of flesh endowed with soul to feel weariness, pain, hunger, thirst, and to be overcome by sleep; of soul using body to feel grief, heaviness, anxiety, and such like. Of these some are natural and necessary to every living creature; others come out of evil will, and are superinduced because of life's lacking proper discipline and training for virtue. Hence it is evident that our Lord assumed the natural affections to establish His real incarnation, and not by way of semblance of incarnation, and that all the affections derived from evil that besmire the purity of our life, He rejected as unworthy of his unsullied Godhead. It is on this account that He is said to have been 'made in the likeness of flesh of sin;' not, as these men hold, in likeness of flesh, but of flesh of sin. It follows that He took our flesh with its natural affections, but 'did not sin'.<sup>36</sup>

Basil's assertion developed the position that the full humanity, body and soul, of Jesus was necessary in order to attain the full redemption of humanity.

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<sup>35</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 201-202.

<sup>36</sup> Basil, *Letter CCLXI*. 3, (NPNF, Vol. VIII, Second Series), 300; see also, *Letter CCLXI*. 2.

Gregory of Nazianzus would further assert that the mind of Christ was a human mind along with a divine mind and this was necessary as long as one thought of the mind in relational terms and not in physical terms. In *Letter CI* he stated, “Do not let the men deceive themselves and others with the assertion that the ‘Man of the Lord’ as they call Him, who is rather our Lord and God, is without a human mind.”<sup>37</sup> Gregory then added his famous statement, “For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.” This is affirmed in the *Third Theological Oration*<sup>38</sup> and a further and a more precise explanation is given in the *Fourth Theological Oration*.<sup>39</sup> The Son has a human will in relation to a divine will with the human will in obedience to the divine will.

In a similar acceptance of the humanity of Christ, Gregory of Nyssa used the concept of the “mingling” of the divine and human. The ‘mingling’ of the divine with humanity is necessary so that humanity might reach its true potential. As Gregory of Nyssa commented, “Then He mingled Himself with our nature, in order that by this mingling with the Divine Being our nature might become divine.”<sup>40</sup> It is in this section from *The Catechetical Orations* that Gregory of Nyssa defended the salvation of humanity because of the descent of God into full human life. The Cappadocian Christology asserted the full humanity and divinity of Christ. The insistence of this position was based on the understanding that it led to the complete human redemption. It was not a partial humanity in union with a full divinity but a complete humanity in union with a complete divine nature.

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<sup>37</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Letter CI*, (NPNF, Vol. VII, Second Series), 439.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration XX* (NPNF, Vol. VII, Second Series), 308-309.

<sup>39</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Fourth Theological Oration XII* (NPNF, Vol. VII, Second Series), 314.

<sup>40</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Orations XXV*, ed., J.H. Srawley, (London: SPCK, 1917), 79-80.



### C. John Wesley's Christological Formulation

The previous two sections set a criteria for assessing John Wesley's Christological formulation since he supported the Nicean-Chalcedonian definition of Christology. The particular analysis presented here will provide a basis for assessing how well he formulated his Christology along the Alexandrian method of Chalcedon and, secondarily, how did John Wesley understand his Christology to be within historic Christian formulations? Wesley's Christology was expressed primarily in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* and in his *Sermons*; there are additional contributions contained in essays, his *Journal* and *Letters*. The starting point for explaining his biblical Christology begins with the interpretation of Johannine Christology.<sup>41</sup>

#### 1. The Person of Christ in *The Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* and *The Sermons*

John Wesley saw a Christological distinction in the Synoptic Gospels from the Gospel of John. The Synoptic Gospels revealed Jesus' humanity while the Gospel of John revealed his divinity. He understood that the Synoptic Gospels were designed, "to prove that Jesus, a true man, was the Messiah. But when at length some from hence began to doubt his Godhead, then St. John expressly asserted it, and wrote in his book as it were a supplement to the Gospels."<sup>42</sup> The most explicit statement on Jesus' divinity comes at the closing of John's Gospel in 20:28. Thomas offers a confession of faith, as Wesley commented, "more explicitly than any other had yet done."<sup>43</sup>

In the *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, John 1:1-4 formed a creation

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<sup>41</sup> John Deschner, 11: "Much of his Christology is thus found in John."

<sup>42</sup> *ENNT*: John 1:1.

<sup>43</sup> *ENNT*: John 20:28.

theology which included human history. Verses 1-2 describe the state of things before creation; verse 3 describes creation; verse 4 describes the time of human innocence; and, verse 5 describes the state of corruption. His specific notes on verse 1 asserted the deity of Christ: "He is the *Word* whom the Father begot or spoke from eternity." Wesley utilised the language of the unity in substance along with the distinction of Christ in the Nicene Creed. Thus he affirmed, Christ was "distinct from God the Father." Wesley asserted that the word *with*, "denotes a perpetual tendency, as it were, of the Son to the Father, in unity of essence. He was with God alone; because nothing beside God had any being..." It is notable in this explanation that Wesley pointed to a trinitarian theology which proclaimed both a common essence with a personal distinction; thus, John Wesley rejected modalism. The phrase, "And the Word was God," meant to Wesley: "Supreme, eternal, independent. There was no creature, in respect of which he could be styled God in a relative sense. Therefore he is styled so in the absolute sense." This is supported from his sermon *The Lord Our Righteousness*.<sup>44</sup> In that sermon the identity of Jesus is God's "eternal, essential, immutable holiness; his infinite justice, mercy, and truth: in all which he and the Father are one."

The description of Christ as fully human and divine is confirmed in other parts of the *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*. In Peter's sermon at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10:36, Peter summarised the soteriological doctrine as Jesus, "preaching the glad tidings of peace." Wesley commented on the source of peace which is in the theanthropic language; "Peace-between God and man, whether Jew or gentile, by the God-man."<sup>45</sup> The same idea is repeated in Heb. 2:9. Jesus is the one who has been crowned with glory and honour for humanity. Wesley's explanation was, "It is done only with regard to Jesus, God-Man, who is

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<sup>44</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* I. 1 (BE) 1:452.

<sup>45</sup> *ENNT*: Acts 10:36.

now *crowned with glory and honour*.”<sup>46</sup> This meant for Wesley that humanity had not achieved this place of honour because humanity could not achieve salvation. Clearly, Wesley was well acquainted with the classic theanthropic language.

The paraphrase that John Wesley offered as a summary of John 1:1-14 was based on a soteriological theme. The point was that Christ, as human and divine, lived among us, “in order to raise us to this dignity and happiness.”<sup>47</sup> From John 1:14 we begin to see a pattern in John Wesley’s development of the life of Christ, it is not only a pattern of the Incarnation, it became the pattern for understanding the response of humanity to salvation:

- i. Condescension: Christ “united himself to our miserable nature;” He did not make a “transient visit, but *tabernacles among us* on earth;”
- ii. Christ’s glory was displayed as the “only begotten of the Father” in the transfiguration, miracles, “his tempers, ministrations, and conduct through the whole series of his life;”
- iii. Conclusion: Christ’s whole life revealed the fullness of “grace and truth.”

This takes us back to the purpose of the Incarnation which was to raise up humanity to Christ’s dignity and happiness.

Though John’s Gospel was designed to assert Jesus’ divinity it is John 1:14 which also identified his humanity. While recognising three possible interpretations of the word “flesh” (corrupt nature, body, or whole humanity), in verse 14, Wesley maintained that “flesh” meant “the whole man,” consequently, Christ was fully human. Thus Christ’s life included all that pertained to humanity and not in a “transient visit.” Christ “tabernacled” or lived among us. It has been pointed out by John Deschner that Wesley’s precise meaning in his Christology is that human nature is meant in a general sense rather than as a specific

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<sup>46</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 2:9.

<sup>47</sup> ENNT: John 1:14.



human being.<sup>48</sup> Deschner commented that John Wesley accepted the orthodox, traditional Christology but a clarification needs to be made. Jesus, according to Wesley, was of the general human nature, yet the human nature of Jesus was not of the substance of Mary.<sup>49</sup> In light of this, Joseph, the husband of Mary, served the purpose of solving the cultural moral problem of Mary appearing to have a child without a husband. As Wesley explained this issue from Luke 1:27: “as Christ was to be born of a pure virgin, so the wisdom of God ordered it to be of one espoused; that is, to prevent reproach, he might have a reputed father according to the flesh.”<sup>50</sup>

John Wesley explained the *communicatio idiomatum* from John 3:13. Interestingly, for Wesley, this was the evidence of Christ’s omnipresence. Jesus is omnipresent because he who was in heaven is also he who came down from heaven. As Wesley stated his interpretation of the verse: “This is the plain instance of what is usually termed the communication of properties between the human and divine nature: whereby what is proper to the divine nature is spoken concerning the human; and what is proper to the human is, as here, spoken of the divine.”<sup>51</sup> He felt obligated to assert that the Son was also in heaven while the Incarnation was active on earth. Thus came the particular insistence on the omnipresence of the Son. Within the tradition of describing the *communicatio idiomatum* there is never an occasion when one can apply the *communicatio idiomatum* from the humanity to the divine and Wesley accepted this.

From John 6:57, John Wesley argued for the essential unity of the Father and the Son

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<sup>48</sup> John Deschner, 28, ‘He, with His Divine nature, condescended to unite himself, not with a man, but with human nature.’

<sup>49</sup> This will be discussed in Section D. ‘John Wesley and the Humanity of Jesus’, 94.

<sup>50</sup> ENNT: Luke 1:27.

<sup>51</sup> ENNT. John 3:13.

calling it an “Amazing union!”<sup>52</sup> The divinity and humanity were further emphasised in John 8:16-19. The Father and the Son are one God though distinct and inseparable from each other. The inseparability is an essential inseparability; “yet Christ did not leave the Father, nor the Father leave him, any more than God leaves heaven when he is said to come down to earth.”<sup>53</sup> This rejected the early church heresy of economic modalism which believed that God was at one time the Father and at another time the Son, but never the Father and the Son at the same time. In verse 19 Wesley asserted that the Father and the Son are distinct, or are “two witnesses,” yet, “one in essence.”<sup>54</sup> Their essential unity was reaffirmed in John 14:10-11.

In John Wesley’s sermon *The End of Christ’s Coming*,<sup>55</sup> Wesley described how God who dwells in unapproachable light reveals who he is through the Son: “He was manifested as the only-begotten Son of God, in glory equal with the Father, to the inhabitants of heaven, before the foundation of the world.” According to this line of thinking, Christ is the revelation of the Father prior to the creation of the world, and then at the creation of the world. Wesley went on to assert that Christ did not dwell in human form prior to the Incarnation. To accept the humanity of Jesus as co-eternal with the Godhead would be to compromise the co-eternity and co-equality of the Father and the Son and Wesley considered it to be the questionable view of hymn writer Isaac Watts.<sup>56</sup> Wesley believed this

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<sup>52</sup> ENNT: John 6:57.

<sup>53</sup> ENNT: John 8:16.

<sup>54</sup> ENNT: John 8:19.

<sup>55</sup> *The End of Christ’s Coming* II. 1 (BE) 2:478.

<sup>56</sup> Watts stated in, ‘The Glory of Christ as God-Man Displayed, Discourse III, Section I, Introduction,’ “Now if by a more careful inspection into the Word of God, we shall find it revealed there the unexpected evidence, that the ‘human soul of our Lord Jesus Christ had an existence, and was personally united to the divine nature, long before it came to dwell in flesh and blood;’ and that by this glorious person, God the Father managed the affairs of his ancient church as his own supreme minister and as the great Mediator and King of his people, and that at a certain appointed period of time God sent down this blessed soul...” Watts continued without break in the sentence to express his praise for such an idea, (*The Works of Isaac Watts*, Vol. 6, 675). Watts would also state in Section III, 680, “Christ, when he came into this world, is said to empty and divest himself of some glory which he had before his incarnation, in several places of Scripture. Now if nothing but

to be a weak point in the theology of Isaac Watts.

John 14:19 revealed a type of implicit recapitulation for John Wesley. He commented, “Because I am the Living One in my divine nature, and shall rise again in my human nature, and live for ever in heaven; therefore, ye shall live the life of faith and love on earth, and hereafter the life of glory.”<sup>57</sup> The human nature, through the earthly ministry of Jesus, is redeemed which means not only that humanity is saved forensically but humanity can live in the pattern of Christ as a result of what Christ accomplished throughout his life. This was also affirmed in the language of “grace and truth” in John 1:14. John Wesley stated of John 1:14, “we are made partakers of them when we are accepted through the Beloved.”

Earlier it was pointed out that for Wesley the Synoptic Gospels were the primary explanation for Jesus’ humanity. The style of Wesley’s presentation of Christ’s humanity takes on the format of constantly relating his humanity to his divinity. In this manner Wesley was obviously trying not to lose the importance of his divinity. At times, even in the Synoptics, the divinity is set to correct an overemphasis on the humanity. For instance, when Mark 6:6 states that Jesus marvelled, Wesley explained that this pertains to his humanity, yet, “As he was God, nothing was strange to him,”<sup>58</sup> or in Mark 13:32 when Jesus claims not to know the time of the return of the Son of Man, Wesley again explained, “as man he was no more omniscient than omnipresent; but as God he knows all the circumstances of it.” It is apparent that Wesley accepted the Cappadocian affirmation of two minds in Christ though he did not analyse the controversy of the two minds, or wills, of Christ.

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his divine nature existed before this time, this divine nature could not properly empty, or divest itself of any glory: Therefore it must be his inferior nature, or his human soul, which did then exist and divest itself of its ancient glory for a season,”

<sup>57</sup> *ENNT*: John 14:9.

<sup>58</sup> *ENNT*. Mark 6:6.



Chalcedon was explicit, Christ was one Person in two Natures. Here John Wesley strongly supported the two nature Christology. Chalcedon had insisted that the human nature and the divine nature were united in one Person. At Chalcedon both the main representatives of the Antiochene Christology and Alexandrian Christology settled for this definition, yet John Wesley revealed the constant challenge of stating this in describing Jesus' life.

## 2. John Wesley and Apollinarius

H. Leitzmann carefully reconstructed the fragments of Apollinarius' existing work and published the results in *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule*.<sup>59</sup> Still, it is difficult to create an authoritative understanding of Apollinarius' theology. But there is agreement that Apollinarius believed that the Logos took the place of the human mind in Jesus, thus Apollinarius created severe problems for a fully developed humanity in Christ.

Apollinarius (c310-c390) had been a life long opponent of the early Antiochene Christology which he considered to be based in Paul of Samosata and continued in Eustathius and Paulinus, and particularly in Diodore of Tarsus. It appears that Apollinarius believed that the Antiochene Christ was not God Incarnate but an individual conjoined with God. Apollinarius regarded the Antiochenes as supporting an external union of the Son to the Godhead, as an inspired man, rather than an internal union of God and humanity.<sup>60</sup> For Apollinarius this led to a misplaced two nature Christology that ignored the union of the complete human and the divine.<sup>61</sup> The implication of this meant, according to Apollinarius,

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<sup>59</sup> Leitzmann. *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule*. (Tubingen, 1904). T.F. Torrance made use of Leitzman's work in his extensive essay on Apollinarianism, *Theology in Reconciliation*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 139-214; see also J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed., (London: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978), 289-295.

<sup>60</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, 290.

<sup>61</sup> Kelly, 290, (*Fragment 81*; Leitzmann, 224).

that God did not save humanity but, rather, humanity through spiritual discipline could achieve salvation. Therefore Apollinarius created a theology in which Christ was considered to be one nature, not two natures. The one nature meant a union of the human and divine (Theos ensarkos).<sup>62</sup> Apollinarius understood this Christology as “the divine energy fulfils the role of the animating spirit (psyches) and the human mind (nous).”<sup>63</sup> Apollinarius expected that this would prevent the problem of two contradictory minds in Christ for he could not conceive of the human changeable, fallible will united with an unchangeable, infallible divine mind.<sup>64</sup>

Despite this Apollinarian line of Christological development Athanasius appeared to regard Apollinarius as a valuable supporter of Nicean orthodoxy and during Apollinarius’ lifetime he was recognised as a Nicene theologian.<sup>65</sup> But difficulty arose after Apollinarius was condemned at the Council of Constantinople (381). Cyril of Alexandria, who supported the one nature Christology, sounded Apollinarian yet he was clearly within Athanasian theology. Yet Francis Young has identified, along with others, that Cyril’s wording, “one enfleshed nature of the God-Word” was not from Athanasius but from Apollinarius.<sup>66</sup> For this

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<sup>62</sup> Kelly, 291, (*De Unione* 2; Leitzmann, 186).

<sup>63</sup> Kelly, 292, (*Fragment* 2; Leitzmann, 204).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. G.L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics*, (London: SPCK, 1940), 110: “Apollinaris clearly denied the human mind of Christ primarily because he could not find a place in his psychological scheme into which he could fit it. Psychology, in ancient times at least, was the parent of heresy.” Frances Young expressed a similar thought in *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 186.

<sup>65</sup> G.L. Prestige pointed out that Athanasius and Apollinarius remained in communion with one another during the fourth century Christological controversies. The friendship produced a collection of letters between the two that are now lost. When Athanasius held a council in Alexandria in 362 Apollinarius was invited to send representatives, 96-97. Francis Young commented, “Athanasius seems to have consulted Apollinarius on theological points, apparently even submitting to him the draft of his *Epistle to Epictetus* for comment. As far as Athanasius was concerned, Apollinarius was a staunch supporter of Nicene orthodoxy, and for most of his life that remained Apollinarius’ reputation,” 182 .

<sup>66</sup> Frances Young, 183. Norman Russell stated, “In Christ God was acting humanly. One of the phrases that Cyril used to express this is the Apollinarian slogan, ‘one incarnate nature of God the Word’ (*mia physis tou Theou Logou sesarkomene*), which he mistakenly thought to be of Athanasian origin,” in *Cyril of Alexandria*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 41. This, of course, does not mean that Cyril had not thought through his Christological construction. His theological influence was such that Russell concluded, “Most Eastern Christian communities defined themselves in relation to Cyril’s teaching,” 63.

reason the later Antiochene theologians believed that Cyril of Alexandria was Apollinarian.

G.L. Prestige summarised the Christology of Apollinarius by stating, "Apollinarius created a theory of his manhood which maximised the redemptive action of God in Christ by detracting from the complete reality of his humanity."<sup>67</sup> This, though, was in critical response to Diodore of Tarsus who had developed a Christology of the early Nestorian variety. Prestige concluded that "Apollinarius...was indubitably a heretic."<sup>68</sup> Still, Prestige did not want Apollinarius to disappear without critical response to the intention of his theology. Prestige was convinced that Apollinarius had a greater positive influence in his day than has been recognised. Again, Prestige commented, "No ancient heretic ever made a comparable contribution to the task of thinking out the implications of the Christian faith. He saw clearly where others were only groping in the twilight: to appreciate that fact it is only necessary to compare him with Basil as an interpreter of the truths for which Athanasius had fought his lifelong battle."<sup>69</sup>

Prestige was not writing to recover the heresy of Apollinarius but to place Apollinarius in his time. Prestige claimed that Apollinarius was historically placed at the end of the illustrious career of Athanasius, and that Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea, did not take sufficient time to engage Apollinarius in theological thinking. Thus Apollinarius was without the challenge of others who were his intellectual equal. It was the contention of Prestige that the innovation of Apollinarius was misunderstood by Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, thus his theological formulation was disregarded rather than developed.<sup>70</sup> Apollinarius had intended to maintain the humanity and divinity of Christ but the

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<sup>67</sup> Prestige, 100.

<sup>68</sup> Prestige, 101.

<sup>69</sup> Prestige, 102.

<sup>70</sup> Prestige, 105.



Cappadocian Gregorys had insisted that Apollinarius supported an eternal humanity in Christ. Prestige, along with C.E. Raven, believed that this was a misinterpretation of Apollinarius. The problem was that the followers of Apollinarius lacked the intellectual skill of their leader.<sup>71</sup>

Apollinarius' attempt to provide a thorough theology of salvation finally resulted in an incomplete system. He revealed the difficulty in accepting the weakness of humanity as constitutive in Christ since God could not be subject to physical, moral, or natural limitations. Prestige quoted Apollinarius' statement, "God is not conditioned in development by the body,"<sup>72</sup> and, "The Word became flesh without assuming a human mind; a human mind is subject to change and is the captive of filthy imaginations; but He was a divine mind, changeless and heavenly."<sup>73</sup> The result of this theology was the reluctance to allow the human mind the opportunity of redemption in Christ. The Cappadocian theologians were correct in asserting that the unassumed is the unhealed and it is on this point that Apollinarius faltered and his theological formulation was condemned. Prestige rejected Apollinarian theology with the statement: "Apollinarius has left no scope for direct action of the Saviour on the souls of men; the only link between the divine spirit of the Saviour and the spirits of mankind is a redeemed flesh. What an extraordinary theory this is!"<sup>74</sup> Though Apollinarius tried to preserve the unity of Christ as human and divine, he did it at the cost of leaving an insufficient reality for the humanity of Christ.

Clarity on the Christology of Apollinarius provides a basis to assess the criticism of John Deschner that Wesley had Apollinarian tendencies. In distinction from Apollinarius, it

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Frances Young. 189-190. Thomas Torrance also accepts the view that the two Cappadocian Fathers cannot be supported in this particular opposition to Apollinarius, in *Theology in Reconciliation*, 144.

<sup>72</sup> Prestige, 111.

<sup>73</sup> *Ep. ad Diocæs* 2; Prestige, 111.

<sup>74</sup> Prestige, 113.

should be noted that John Wesley did believe that Jesus had a human will and it was always in obedience to the Father. The human will of Jesus was distinct from the human will of others only on the basis of obedience. This is clear in his sermon *The Repentance of Believers*. Wesley stated:

Our blessed Lord himself had a will as a man; otherwise he had not been a man. But his human will was invariably subject to the will of the Father. At all times, and on all occasions, even in the deepest afflictions, he could say, 'Not as I will but as Thou wilt.' But this is not the case at all times, even with a true believer in Christ. He frequently finds his will more or less exalting itself against the will of God.<sup>75</sup>

We might note that John Wesley appeared to be rejecting the Apollinarian denial of the human mind of Jesus.

It is in Wesley's observations on Luke 2 that we find a more authentic description of the humanity of Jesus. The section in the *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* on Luke 2:40-52 allows Jesus' humanity to have a more realistic role. He recognised that Jesus grew in bodily strength and stature but he also stated, "The powers of his human mind daily grew."<sup>76</sup> Jesus' wisdom was the result of the "light of the indwelling Spirit" and God's grace was revealed as the "peculiar favour of God rested upon him even as man."<sup>77</sup> At this point Wesley turned to Irenaeus' thought and stated, "So our Lord passed through and sanctified every stage of human life. Old age only did not become him."<sup>78</sup> It appears that Wesley did not interpret the Irenaeus quote with an Irenaeus meaning. It will be pointed out in this dissertation that Wesley was uncomfortable with the imputed righteousness of Jesus' humanity. He believed that this led to antinomianism and so the humanity that Jesus' sanctified was his own not that of humanity in general. In Luke 2:52 with the statement that Jesus grew in favour with God, Wesley restated the idea with, "It plainly follows, that though

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<sup>75</sup> *The Repentance of Believers* I. 4 (BE) I: 337.

<sup>76</sup> ENNT: Luke 2:40.

<sup>77</sup> ENNT: Luke 2: 40.

<sup>78</sup> ENNT: Luke 2: 43.

a man were pure, even as Christ was pure, still he would have room to increase in holiness, and, in the love of God.” He meant that Christ’s humanity was sanctified as a pattern of holiness for all to follow. This will be explained further in the chapters on the priestly and prophetic offices of Christ.

#### D. John Wesley’s Understanding of Jesus’ Humanity

Article II of the *Articles of Religion* in the *Book of Common Prayer* stated the definition on Christology. The Article defined the Person of Christ as:

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, was joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of man.

Wesley’s revision of Article II is slight but significant for it contains the omission of Jesus’ humanity as derived from the *substance of Mary*. In his *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, Wesley redesigned the *Articles of Religion*. Article II stated:<sup>79</sup>

The Son, who is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God. Of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin: for that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhood and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men.

The revision of Article II omitted the phrase, *of her substance*, in reference to Jesus’ humanity. Clearly, Wesley was not in agreement with Anglican theology nor historic Christology. Since Wesley offered no explicit explanation for the revision the question

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<sup>79</sup> *John Wesley’s Sunday Service for the Methodists in North America*, (The United Methodist Publishing House and the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry), 306.



remains as to his purpose. There might be two possible suggestions:

1. Since the analogy of Christ and Adam was important, Wesley may have wanted to preserve the similarity of divine creation of Adam and Christ. Just as Adam was created out of nothing, so the humanity of Jesus was created out of nothing. Thus the typology of Christ and Adam was precise. Yet, is this adequate for the doctrine of human salvation?
2. This could have led Wesley to a second point. Just as Adam was created without sin, so Christ was created without sin. This, of course, preserved Jesus' sinlessness which Wesley was prepared to rigorously defend. But, once again, is this adequate for the doctrine of human salvation?

Apparently, behind this methodology was the Augustinian doctrine of original sin which Wesley fully accepted. Wesley, trying to avoid any connection of original sin to Jesus, possibly thought that since Jesus' humanity was created by God and not derived from Mary, he had solved the problem. The difficulty was that Wesley did not explain his source for this type of theology so we are left to speculate as to his theological purpose.<sup>80</sup> Wesley's eclectic use of sources makes it difficult to trace the source of this particular incarnational Christology. Did he develop this position on his own or did he find it in some other Christology which he then incorporated into his own system? A survey of various sources of Wesley's theology will indicate that Wesley must have known that his position was unusual. It was certainly not derived from the major theological writings from which Wesley created his theological positions.

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<sup>80</sup> There is an historical precedent for this theology in the Radical Reformation. Walter Klaassen has identified the theologians of the Radical Reformation who supported the view that Jesus' humanity did not come from Mary. He stated, "...beginning with Hoffman, and continuing with Rothman, Menno Simons, and Dirk Philips ...All these writers emphasised that Jesus had not received the flesh from Mary but rather came with heavenly flesh...", in *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*, (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981), 23-24. Klaassen then included the writings of these theologians to illustrate the concept of 'heavenly flesh'. There is no indication that John Wesley consulted or read these theologians.

## E. Understanding Jesus' Humanity: Jesus' Relationship to Mary

It has been pointed out that John Wesley developed the peculiar viewpoint that Jesus' humanity was a particular creation of God and was not derived from the humanity of Mary. The question is, was this idea original to John Wesley or did he discover this understanding from the Incarnational theology of others? A brief survey of a representative group of sources for Wesley's theology will be helpful to point out the Eastern and Western Patristic and Church of England theological disagreements with Wesley's own thought. This compilation comes from sources known to John Wesley.

### 1. Patristic Sources: Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, and Athanasius

#### a. Ignatius of Antioch

It is noticeable in John Wesley's revision of the *Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* that he deliberately left out the frequent statements by Ignatius that Jesus was born of "the seed of David." The portions of Ignatius' letters which include the references to the specific humanity of Jesus are listed.<sup>81</sup>

Ephesians 20: Assemble yourselves together in common, everyone of you severally, man by man, in grace, in one faith and one Jesus Christ, who after the flesh was of David's race, who is Son of Man and Son of God....

Trallians 9: Be ye deaf therefore, when any man speaketh to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary....

Romans 7: I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ who was of the seed of David....

It is to be repeated that John Wesley did not deny the humanity of Jesus but he appeared to

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<sup>81</sup> Reference to John Wesley's use of Ignatius is listed in Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change*, (Nashville: Kingsway Books, 1991), 80; also, Wesley's paraphrase of Ignatius' letters is found in his *Christian Library*, Vol. 1:32-59.

be uncomfortable with the language and concepts of Ignatius of Antioch. Once again, there appears to be a certain definite caution in John Wesley in the manner in which to express the humanity. References to, “the flesh was of David’s race,” “the race of David,” “the seed of David,” were eliminated in Wesley’s editing of Ignatius in Volume 1 of the *Christian Library*. Wesley’s consistent preference was to understand that Jesus’ humanity was a creation of God.

#### b. Irenaeus

Irenaeus’ theological position on salvation was based on the doctrine of recapitulation. In this Irenaeus asserted that Christ took up true humanity into his life and, in so doing, redeemed humanity from sin and death. Christ, according to Irenaeus, passed through every stage of human life in order to redeem it. If Christ had not done this then humanity could not have received redemption or victory over sin and death.

Irenaeus made the comparison between Adam and Christ. Adam, as Irenaeus explained, was made from virgin soil, the source of his humanity. Christ, on the other hand, was made from Mary, the virgin, the source of Jesus’ humanity. Irenaeus explained it in this manner:

For it behoved Him who was to destroy sin, and redeem man under the power of death, that he should himself be made that very same thing which he was that is, man, who had been drawn by sin into bondage, but was held by death, so that sin should be destroyed by man, and man should go forth from death. For as by the disobedience of the one man who was originally moulded from virgin’s soil, the many were made sinners, and forfeited life, so it was necessary that, by the obedience of the one man, who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation.<sup>82</sup>

This was the basis of the doctrine of recapitulation in the work of Irenaeus.

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<sup>82</sup> *Adversus Haeresus* III.18.7 (ANF, Vol. 1).



Irenaeus again stated the source of Jesus' humanity as from Mary: "He, therefore, the Son of God, our Lord, being the Word of the Father, and the Son of Man, since he had a generation as to his human nature from Mary - who descended from mankind, and, who was herself a human being - was made the Son of Man."<sup>83</sup> Irenaeus explained why Jesus' humanity should be from Mary and not a new creation from God. Irenaeus asked, "Why, then, did not God again take dust, but wrought so that the formation should be of Mary?" He answered, "It was that there might not be another formation called into being, nor any other which should (require to) be saved, but that the very same formation should be summed up (in Christ as had existed in Adam), the analogy having been preserved."<sup>84</sup>

Following this, Irenaeus asserted that to take any other position than that Jesus received his humanity from Mary, is to err. To receive the substance of humanity other than from another human does not serve the doctrine of recapitulation and calls into question our humanity that needs redemption.<sup>85</sup>

### c. Athanasius

There has been an attempt to explain that Athanasius held to the position that Jesus was both a human body and mind as a theological statement. At this point all that needs to be explained is the source of Jesus' humanity. On this topic his position was the same as that of Irenaeus. Jesus' humanity was taken from the humanity of Mary. In his letter to Epictetus, Athanasius explained: "Or how did men called Christians venture even to doubt whether the Lord, Who proceeded from Mary, while Son of God by essence and nature, is of the seed of David according to the flesh, and of the flesh of the Holy Mary?"<sup>86</sup> Athanasius considered the

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<sup>83</sup> *Adversus Haereses* III.19.3.

<sup>84</sup> *Adversus Haereses* III.21.10.

<sup>85</sup> *Adversus Haereses* III.22; IV.14.2.

<sup>86</sup> *To Epictetus* 2, Letter LIV, (NPNF Vol. IV).

belief that Jesus' human nature came from Mary to be part of the Christian understanding of the humanity of Christ. This preserved the doctrine that Jesus' humanity was the same as all humanity.<sup>87</sup> It was only in Jesus taking the form of humanity, in this case humanity from Mary, that the complete salvation offered from God to humanity could be understood.

Alvyn Pettersen's study of Athanasius explained that the letter Athanasius wrote to Epictetus, Bishop of Corinth, was an attempt to resolve the conflict in Corinth over defining the humanity of Jesus.<sup>88</sup> Some in Corinth had suggested that Jesus' humanity was co-essential with the divine Logos. If Jesus' humanity was from Mary, then, according to the Corinthian interpretation, the Incarnation denied the Triad since the body is foreign to the essence of the divine.<sup>89</sup> Athanasius objected that what was born of Mary was not separate from her humanness. As Athanasius explained in the letter, it was not the Trinity that was endangered by the Incarnation but rather humanity was made more human by the Incarnation. As Pettersen summarised the explanation of Athanasius, "The eternally simple God is then neither enlarged nor bettered through the body's assumption. Rather, it is the assumed flesh which is bettered as a result of its fellowship and union with the enlivening Logos."<sup>90</sup>

## 2. Western Patristic Sources: Augustine

Augustine wrote from the position of full acceptance of the classical doctrine of Jesus' humanity and divinity. He also accepted the position that Jesus' humanity came from the substance of Mary. This explains why the virginity of Mary was crucial. Augustine, in his theological debate with Pelagian theology, asserted that original sin was passed on in

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<sup>87</sup> Cf., also *On the Incarnation* 34; *Against the Arians* 261; *To Epictetus* 5.

<sup>88</sup> Alvyn Pettersen. *Athanasius*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 120-121.

<sup>89</sup> *To Epictetus* 8.

<sup>90</sup> Pettersen, 121.

humanity through the sexual union of male and female. This produced a type of substantive form of original sin and such a view was accepted in his victory over Pelagian views. It was through the virgin birth that Augustine could insist on Jesus' humanity as derived from Mary and, as a result, this led to the conclusion of Jesus' sinlessness. Augustine clarified this in the

*Enchiridion*:

This at least we say: that the Word was made flesh through the assuming of flesh by divinity, not by the conversion of divinity into flesh. By 'flesh' here we must understand 'manhood', the expression indicating the whole by its part, as in the text, *Because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified*, meaning 'no man'. For it is intolerable to say that in that assumption of human nature any part of it was lacking. Yet was that nature in every sense free from every bond of sin: not as one is when born of both sexes through carnal concupiscence with trespass as entail, the guilt of which is washed away by regeneration; but as one must needs be who was born of a virgin, conceived by his mother's faith, not by passion.<sup>91</sup>

This position is reaffirmed later in the same theological document:

So then he was engendered, or rather conceived, apart from any pleasure of carnal concupiscence, and thus had contracted no sin by reason of his origin: moreover by the grace of God he was in a marvellous and ineffable manner conjoined and interknit in unity of person with the Father's only-begotten Word, who is not by grace but by nature the Son, and therefore himself committed no sin...<sup>92</sup>

The point that Augustine repeated was that the virgin birth preserved the sinlessness of Jesus because the humanity of Jesus is derived from the physical substance of Mary but without sexual union with Joseph. Though John Wesley based his understanding of original sin in the Augustinian formulation, he did not obtain his particular view of Jesus' humanity from Augustine.

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<sup>91</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion* 34, trans., Ernest Evans, (London: SPCK, 1953), 32.

<sup>92</sup> *Enchiridion* 41, 38-39.



### 3. Church of England

#### a. John Pearson (1612/13 - 1686)

John Pearson was a clergyman in the Church of England who supported the royalty in the war between Parliament and King Charles I. Around 1643 he preached a series of sermons on the Apostle's Creed and in 1659 these were published in written form under the title, *An Exposition on the Creed*. The production was constantly republished with improvements. With the restoration of Charles II, Pearson received many 'preferments and honours' which included a doctor of Divinity from the King and an appointment of Master of Jesus College at Cambridge. Then in 1661 he was appointed Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity. In 1662 he was elected to the mastership of Trinity College and in 1672 he became the Bishop of Chester. Bishop Pearson was a Patristics scholar and defended the episcopal form of church government basing his arguments on the Letters of St. Ignatius.

In John Wesley's *Journal* on Feb. 23, 1749,<sup>93</sup> he gave a brief account of gathering a group of Methodist preachers at Kingswood and following his pattern of teaching from Oxford, Wesley began to read lectures to them. There were seventeen preachers present and they were divided into two classes. To one class Wesley read from Pearson's, *An Exposition of the Creed*. We may gather from this that Wesley had a great appreciation for Bishop John Pearson's academic work.

Pearson stated that his purpose in writing on the Apostle's Creed was to offer "a brief comprehension of the objects of our Christian faith, and is generally taken to contain all things necessary to be believed."<sup>94</sup> Pearson's intention was to explain the sense and truth of

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<sup>93</sup> *Journal*, Feb. 23, 1749, (BE) 20: 263.

the Creed and to identify the purpose of this early Church Creed. Pearson was completely orthodox in supporting the classic historic doctrines of the Church.

His Christology was stated in terms of the humanity and divinity of Christ and in the defence and discussion of the Apostle's Creed he identified the source of the humanity of Jesus: "we must acknowledge a true, real, and proper conception, by which the Virgin did conceive of her own substance the true and real substance of our Saviour..."<sup>95</sup> Pearson affirmed that the humanity of Jesus was based on the humanity of Mary. He added: "In respect of him it was necessary, first, that we might be assured that he was made, or begotten of a woman, and consequently that he had from her the true nature of man."<sup>96</sup>

It is clear from Pearson's account that he was fully immersed in the Augustinian interpretation of original sin. He accepted that original sin passed into humanity through the sexual union and thus all humanity is born with original sin. This posed a problem when it is asserted that Jesus was sinless. Pearson understood this dilemma so he stated, "For as it behoved him in all things to be made like unto us; so in that great similitude a dissimilitude was as necessary, that he should be 'without sin'."<sup>97</sup> Pearson's solution, like Augustine, was found in the virginity of Mary. Again he stated,

our Saviour hath received the same nature without any culpable inclination because born of a virgin without any seminal traduction our high-priest is "separate from sinners," not only in the actions of his life, but in the production of his nature...so though we being in the loins of Adam may be all said to sin in him, yet Christ, who descended from the same Adam according to the flesh, was not a partaker of that sin, but an expiation for it. For he who is contained in the seminal virtue of his parent, is some way under his natural power, and therefore may be in some manner concerned in his actions; but he who is only from him by his natural substance, according to a

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<sup>94</sup> John Pearson, *An Exposition of the Creed*, (London: Ward, Lock, & Co., Warwick House, 1659, 1854), 'To the Reader,' 3.

<sup>95</sup> Pearson, 149.

<sup>96</sup> Pearson, 150.

<sup>97</sup> Pearson, 150.

passive or obediential power, and so receiveth not his propogation from him, cannot be so included in him as to be obliged by his actions, or obnoxious to his demerits.<sup>98</sup>

Pearson took the position that Jesus was from the substance of Mary and thus human. Since his birth was not based on the sexual union of Joseph and Mary original sin was not applicable. Thus Jesus was not contaminated by original sin.

From this account of selected theologians of both the eastern and western tradition, and familiar to John Wesley, the commonly held belief that Jesus' humanity came from the substance of Mary was not accepted by Wesley. Wesley deliberately altered the historical position without comment or explanation. Still, Wesley accepted the full humanity of Jesus. Now it is possible to elaborate further on Wesley's Christology by explaining Jesus' divinity.

#### F. Reasons for Wesley's Emphasis on the Divinity of Christ

John Wesley offered critical comments on Christological proposals that appeared to deny the divinity of Christ. He was particularly conscious of the 18th century theological work of people who supported the ideas of the Socinians or, as he sometimes called them, the Arians. Wesley had rejected the theology of Sabellius and Arius in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* and this was particularly revealed in his comments on John 10:30. Though Sabellian theology did not see a resurgence in Wesley's day, Arian theology did have a form in 18<sup>th</sup> century England. Two words in The *Explanatory Notes* solved the dual problem for Wesley. The verb *are* in "I and the Father are one" meant, for Wesley, a "plurality of persons."<sup>99</sup> This revealed the distinction of the trinitarian persons. The word *one* countered the Arians by indicating "the unity of nature in God." Wesley added to his explanation that if

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<sup>98</sup> Pearson, 150-151.

<sup>99</sup> *ENNT*: John 10:30.



Jesus was not God then “he must have been the vilest of men.”

John Wesley made some crucial criticisms of John Taylor’s understanding of the doctrine of original sin. This was particularly important to Wesley since Taylor insisted that he had based his views on scripture. Wesley accused Taylor of underestimating the devastation of sin and had therefore misinterpreted the Genesis account of the Fall and Romans 5:12-19, especially the Adam-Christ typology. In his treatise, *The Doctrine of Sin According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*,<sup>100</sup> it was in Part II.I.18.4-5 that we gain an important interpretation of Wesley’s Christology. Wesley accused Taylor of being a deist and he expressed his concern over the lack of emphasis on the deity of Christ. Taylor’s position appeared to be along the lines of Christ as the great example and we are therefore to gain our understanding of salvation from following Christ’s example of obedience which came from his personal character. To answer Taylor, Wesley turned to Revelation 5 and the description of Christ as the Lamb and placed this in opposition to Taylor’s own words.

Wesley quoted Taylor as asking: “How shall we account for all man’s rising again, by the obedience of another man, Jesus Christ?”<sup>101</sup> Then Taylor’s own answer is given: “Why? Because thou hast exhibited to God such an instance of virtue, obedience, and goodness. Thou hast sacrificed thy life in the cause of truth, and ‘hast redeemed us’ by that act of the highest obedience.” Here Wesley showed great consternation. He believed that Taylor was denying the deity of Christ. The denial was not directly stated but it was directly implied. Wesley interpreted Taylor as being coy in the matter: “You do not care to say directly, ‘Jesus Christ is either a little God, or he is no God at all.’ So you say it indirectly, in a heap of

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<sup>100</sup> *The Doctrine of Sin According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, (Jackson Vol. IX): 191-464.

<sup>101</sup> *The Doctrine of Sin According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, 260.

smooth, laboured, decent circumlocutions.”<sup>102</sup> Wesley continued to question whether Taylor’s use of Rev. 5 could carry the weight of his interpretation of salvation by the example of Jesus. The point that Wesley was making was that Revelation 5 equated the Lamb with God.

The subject of Wesley’s disagreement with John Taylor was that obedience does not adequately deal with the nature of Jesus. Wesley rhetorically asked: “Is it on this ground alone, that ‘all the angels of God’ are to ‘worship him?’ Or rather, because ‘in the beginning,’ from everlasting, he was with God, and was God?”<sup>103</sup> Wesley went on to question Taylor: “‘It was not the mere natural power or strength of the Lamb, but his most excellent character,’ – Sir, do you honour the Son, even as you honour the Father? If you did, could you possibly talk of him in this strain?”<sup>104</sup> The point that Wesley made was that the imitation of Christ’s redemption was an inadequate way of attributing honour to him. The theological background expressed by John Taylor, Wesley understood to be of Socinian origin.

In Wesley’s 1742 essay, *The Character of a Methodist*, he wrote: “We believe Christ to be the Eternal Supreme God; and herein are we distinguished from the Socinians and Arians.”<sup>105</sup> In Christology, Wesley left no doubt about his affirmation of Nicean and Chalcedonian definitions. This was part of the identity of Methodism. It was integral to his understanding of ‘true’ Christianity and ‘true’ spirituality. There was no doubt that Methodism was part of the historic Christian faith.

The issue remains that there should be an explanation of his emphasis on the relationship between the divine and human nature in Christ. The attempts to explain Wesley’s Christological relationship are found in the doctrine of salvation, but within the

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<sup>102</sup> *The Doctrine of Sin According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, 260.

<sup>103</sup> *The Doctrine of Sin According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, 260-261.

<sup>104</sup> *The Doctrine of Sin According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, 261.

<sup>105</sup> *The Character of a Methodist* (BE) 9:34.

soteriological framework the critical responses vary. John Deschner proposed that there was a priority of the divine nature and this could be explained on the soteriological basis that stress on Christ's active obedience would undercut our own obedience. Deschner commented:

"Wesley's dislike of the antinomian understanding of imputed holiness has led him to play down Christ's active obedience. This agrees with, if it is not actually the root of, Wesley's general reserve about Christ's human nature."<sup>106</sup> According to Deschner, the imputation of the human obedience of Christ would undermine an acceptance of our responsibility to be obedient to Christ. Here Deschner made an important point. Though Wesley accepted Christ's humanity he certainly rejected the imputation of Christ's active obedience, thus his active work in his humanness was not to be related to any meaning for human atonement.

Alternatively, Randy Maddox indicated that John Wesley was concerned that people might become "over familiar" with Christ. As Maddox explained: "I wonder however, if it is not more an expression of his distaste for being overly 'familiar' with the Great Lord of Heaven. One of the characteristics that Wesley found admirable in Jesus was his custom (so Wesley assumed) of calling his mother simply 'woman', showing that he did not relate to her even 'after the flesh'. It would appear that Wesley went overboard in trying to pay the same (supposed) compliment to Jesus!"<sup>107</sup> Again, this has soteriological concerns. Wesley had specifically stated that over familiarity with Jesus would lessen the impact of the awe one was to maintain about the knowledge of the Person of Christ. Apparently, a full appreciation of salvation as completely the action of God has the tendency in Wesley to diminish the weight of the human nature of Christ.

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<sup>106</sup> John Deschner, 167.

<sup>107</sup> Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 116.



John Wesley's critique of John Taylor's deist theology should not be ignored. In a letter to John Taylor he expressed a concern over Taylor not allowing for a full human and divine Christology with the accompanying implication for the doctrine of the atonement. When Wesley wrote to John Taylor he stated: "For take away the scriptural doctrine of redemption, justification, and the new birth, the beginning of sanctification; or, which amounts to the same, explain them as you do,-and in what is Christianity better than Heathenism? Wherein (save in rectifying some of your notions) has the religion of St. Paul any pre-eminence over that of Socrates or Epictetus?"<sup>108</sup> Wesley went on to argue that if the foundation was not secure then the rest of the structure was not valid. Wesley believed that the deist emphasis on the sole humanity of Christ undermined the foundation of Christian theology and, consequently, Christian life. His emphasis on the deity of Christ was a statement on the inadequate theology of John Taylor and the deists. Once again, this had soteriological implications. A full Christology of Jesus' deity and humanity was the only adequate theology that could deal with the salvation of humanity but the emphasis lay in the divinity of Christ.

It should also be noted that there was a division of the Eastern Church following Chalcedon. The Monophysites were unhappy and openly objected to the language of the two natures in one Person terminology. Yet the Monophysite theology had not rejected the humanity of Jesus, they were supportive of Cyril of Alexandria's terminology of 'one nature of God the Word Incarnate.' Monophysitism was able to interpret the language as preserving a higher level of deification. It established for them the understanding that Christ had overcome human weakness and frailty to sanctify it by union with the divine. Though the specific terms of Monophysitism appeared to undermine the humanity of Jesus, that was not

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<sup>108</sup> *Letter to John Taylor*, July 3, 1759 (Telford IV, 67).

the intention of Cyril of Alexandria, nor the intention of the Monophysites. The language was intended to demonstrate the deification of humanity.<sup>109</sup> The Eastern orthodox theology rejected the Monophysites, or rather the Monophysites rejected Chalcedon. Yet their theology did not find support in John Wesley. Wesley moved within the Western theological system and related his doctrine of holiness to Western theology in relation to particular biblical texts.

This lengthy survey demonstrates a long historic tradition that required Jesus' humanity, in order to be effective for humanity, to proceed from the humanity of Mary. Only in this manner could Jesus' life and death be accurately effective for the human condition; Jesus must be one of us in actuality. John Wesley's proposal, for whatever reason that he presented it, remained inadequate. To protect Jesus from the human condition ultimately makes him too far removed to be effective. Wesley's theological system suffers from creating a human Jesus unlike humanity. Both the Eastern and Western traditions understood this, regardless of the differences between the two traditions, and advocated that Jesus' humanity must proceed from Mary in order for salvation, and atonement in particular, to be actual. John Wesley did not see it and for that deficiency in his theological system needs to be corrected. We shall now turn to the specific New Testament hymns or credal statements and see how Wesley interpreted them.

#### G. The New Testament Christological Hymns

The New Testament Christological hymns played a part in explaining Wesley's understanding of the Person of Christ. Through Phil. 2:6-11 Wesley described Jesus' divinity

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<sup>109</sup> See Alexander Schmemmann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, trans., Lydia W. Kesich, (London: Harville Press, 1963), 130-134, for a useful but brief discussion on the soteriology of the Monophysites.

and humanity; a Christological pattern was formed in which Jesus' humanity was explained in the prior light of his divinity. Jesus was pre-existent in "essential form," "The incomparable nature of God – From eternity, as he was afterward in the form of man; real God, real man."<sup>110</sup> From the prior divine nature, Wesley identified the idea of kenosis. As Wesley explained, "Though he remained *full*, John i.14, yet he appeared as if he had been *empty*; for he veiled his fullness from the sight of men and angels. Yea, he not only veiled, but, in some sense, renounced, the glory which he had before the world began."<sup>111</sup> Lest one accuse John Wesley of falling into a docetic type of Christology when he used the language of "veiled," the other statements which asserted Jesus' full humanity rescued him from being found guilty. In the same passage Wesley described Jesus as "A real man;" and, "A common man, without any peculiar excellence or comeliness."<sup>112</sup> Wesley asserted that Jesus was in an absolute meaning human and appeared "to sight and sense" as such.<sup>113</sup> Wesley appeared to use the term 'veiled' in a deliberate manner; it meant for him not a kenosis in the sense of a loss of divine essence, therefore to further explain kenosis it is necessary to turn to John 11 and the story of the raising of Lazarus. But first, reference will be made to other NT passages.

In John 8:59 and Luke 4:30 <sup>114</sup> Jesus escaped from the mobs by becoming invisible according to Wesley. This was an example of the divine nature taking over the human properties. John's Gospel states that Jesus concealed himself and Luke's Gospel records, "But passing through the midst of them;" in both cases Wesley concluded that Jesus became invisible. Although, if Jesus was not invisible in Luke's Gospel then Wesley offered the alternative that he "overawed" them so that they could not touch him. The implication was a

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<sup>110</sup> ENNT: Phil. 2:6.

<sup>111</sup> ENNT: Phil. 2:7.

<sup>112</sup> ENNT: Phil. 2:8.

<sup>113</sup> ENNT: Phil. 2:7.

<sup>114</sup> ENNT: John 8:59 and Luke 4:30.



divine manifestation.

The same emphasis is reiterated in Col. 1:15-20. Jesus is “in his divine nature the invisible image, in his human the visible image, of the Father.”<sup>115</sup> He was “begotten before any creature, subsisting before all worlds, before all time, from all eternity.” Jesus’ descent from heaven to earth was to “the most eminent part, the church.”<sup>116</sup> Again, the emphasis leads to an understanding of the purpose of the Incarnation which was for the salvation of humanity.

This theme is repeated in Wesley’s sermon *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*. Christ is the “incommunicable nature of God from eternity ....”<sup>117</sup> and the language of Phil. 2:6 “implies both the fullness and the supreme height of the Godhead.”<sup>118</sup> Yet Christ “emptied himself” when he “veiled his fullness from the eyes of men and angels.” In this Christ is “a real man like other men.”

Yet this must be held in tension with the more deliberate and exacting descriptions of Jesus’ humanity in his earthly ministry. John Wesley’s comments on the story of Lazarus in John 11 are particularly illuminating on the point of Jesus’ humanity. Verses 33-35 include an indication of the emotional aspect of Jesus’ life and Wesley deliberately downplayed any sense of emotion that could overwhelm Jesus. When verse 33 stated that Jesus “groaned deeply,” Wesley interpreted this as “he restrained his tears.”<sup>119</sup> The implication is that Jesus had control over his emotions, not that Jesus was emotionless. In verse 36 the Johannine comment is “Jesus wept.” Once again, Wesley was not about to allow human emotions to

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<sup>115</sup> ENNT: Col. 1:15.

<sup>116</sup> ENNT: Col. 1:15, 17.

<sup>117</sup> *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* I. 4 (BE) 3:201.

<sup>118</sup> ENNT: Phil. 2:6.

<sup>119</sup> ENNT: John 11:33.

overwhelm Jesus. His explanation of the emotional expression in Jesus was, “Out of sympathy with those who were in tears all around him, as well as from a deep sense of the misery sin had brought upon human nature.”<sup>120</sup> Wesley certainly used an explanation that drew attention away from human emotion that is unrestrained, he did not deny human emotions in Jesus and this was the consistent picture that he preferred.

#### H. New Testament Patterns of Christology

The stages of the earthly life of Jesus can be described in two distinct patterns. The first pattern is that of the descent of Christ, and the second is the ascent of Christ. The descent-ascent pattern is more commonly called humiliation and exaltation in John Wesley’s language. The humiliation and exaltation are identified in varying ways and in various passages in his work. An outline of the overall pattern is represented in these passages:

*Letter to a Roman Catholic*<sup>121</sup>

#### HUMILIATION

conception by the Holy Spirit  
born of the virgin Mary  
suffered the pains of body and spirit  
suffered death on the cross  
buried

#### EXALTATION

resurrection  
ascension  
reign in heaven  
second coming in judgement

*Luke 1:3*<sup>122</sup>

#### HUMILIATION

conception  
birth  
childhood  
baptism  
miracles  
preaching  
passion

#### EXALTATION

resurrection  
ascension

*I Peter 1:11*<sup>123</sup>

#### HUMILIATION

#### EXALTATION

resurrection  
ascension  
exaltation  
effusion of the Holy Spirit  
last judgement  
eternal kingdom

<sup>120</sup> *ENNT*: John 11:36.

<sup>121</sup> *JWO*, 494-495.

<sup>122</sup> *ENNT*. Luke 1:3.

<sup>123</sup> *ENNT*. I Peter 1:11.

Wesley's comments on other Christological passages such as Philippians 2:6-11 and I Timothy 3:16 did not add any other information to the above pattern except to follow the basic outline.<sup>124</sup>

Finally, it is necessary to take into consideration Wesley's constant concern regarding the possibility of an overemphasis on Jesus' humanity. This concern runs like a thread throughout his discussions on the Person of Christ. Wesley is more explicit on this in his sermon *On Knowing Christ After the Flesh*. The sermon centred on the interpretation of the words, "after the flesh" and Wesley meant that we are not to know Jesus as "a mere man."<sup>125</sup> He pointed out that the spiritual person does not diminish Jesus' divinity at the expense of his humanity. A list was created of those who had defective Christologies, that is, a Christology that included Jesus' humanity but not his divinity. Those who knew Jesus "after the flesh" were:

- i. Socinians who deny the divinity of Christ. Wesley named John Taylor, "a man of great learning, and uncommon abilities as a leader;"<sup>126</sup>
- ii. Arians who deny Christ is "the great God." Wesley also continually avoided subordinationism in his Christology;<sup>127</sup>
- iii. Wesley argued against critics who tried to turn Issac Watts into an Arian. Yet Wesley did not like the language of Watts in his unguarded 'familiarity' with Christ. This, according to Wesley, was also true of the Moravians.<sup>128</sup>

Over familiarity with Christ tended to overemphasise Jesus' humanity while not properly acknowledging Christ's awesome divinity. Wesley acknowledged that his criticism of others

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<sup>124</sup> ENNT: Phil. 2:6-11; I Tim. 3:16.

<sup>125</sup> *On Knowing Christ After the Flesh* (BE) 4: 99-100.

<sup>126</sup> *On Knowing Christ After the Flesh* proem 4: 99-100.

<sup>127</sup> *On Knowing Christ After the Flesh* proem 5: 100.

<sup>128</sup> *On Knowing Christ After the Flesh* proem 6-8: 100-101.



could create a reaction against him in insisting that he devalued “true scriptural devotion.”<sup>129</sup>

So the Christological phrase was inserted into the sermon from the Nicene Creed: “very man...very God.” Wesley then asserted that proper devotion was “a love to his Redeemer...mixed with angelic fear.”<sup>130</sup>

#### H. Summary of John Wesley’s Christology

There is no doubt that John Wesley wrote his Christology with the intention of explaining a biblically oriented doctrine of Christ with the support of Nicene-Chalcedonian creedal formulations. His biblical understanding of the Incarnation followed the general direction of a Johannine Christology which he interpreted as the unity of the divine and human in Christ with the full acceptance of the Chalcedonian Definition. This meant that the Logos did not replace the humanity in the Apollinarian fashion. Still there seems to be no doubt that the divinity does take precedence over the humanity in this theological system. It must be remembered that Wesley believed that there was a similar historical controversy concerning Christology in the fourth century Church and Wesley entered into that controversy against the eighteenth century Socinians.

There is clear evidence that the Incarnation was understood in a descent and ascent movement of God. The interpretation for this movement was the Incarnation followed by Jesus’ death and resurrection which explained the purpose of the humiliation and exaltation. As the human representative Apollinarian theology is denied and Nestorianism is not accepted. As the human representative Christ died for all humanity yet not all humanity will accept the offer of salvation. We can now move to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which

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<sup>129</sup> *On Knowing Christ After the Flesh* proem 8: 101.

<sup>130</sup> *On Knowing Christ After the Flesh* proem 13: 104.

further elucidates the human reception of salvation.

### Chapter 3 The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

#### A. The Person of the Spirit

In what may be termed John Wesley's *Credo*, he identified the belief he maintained on the Holy Spirit which he claimed was among those who were 'true' Protestants.<sup>1</sup>

Wesley defined his position on the Person of the Holy Spirit by stating:

I believe the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy in himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us: enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions, purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.<sup>2</sup>

A briefer but similar statement was contained in the *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, Article IV of the *Articles of Religion*. This statement was an exact repetition of the *Book of Common Prayer* Article V:

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one Substance, Majesty, and Glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

There is no doubt that these two doctrinal statements identify Wesley within the historic Creeds of Christianity. His particular note on the filioque clause further identified him as an adherent to the Augustinian/western understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit. For Wesley, the Holy Spirit was fully God, of one substance with the Father and the Son, and participates in the event of salvation for humanity.

Wesley maintained a consistency in his explanation of the person of the Holy Spirit. In the *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* Wesley quoted John 15:26 and

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<sup>1</sup> *A Letter to a Roman Catholic* pt. 13, JWO, 496.

<sup>2</sup> *A Letter to a Roman Catholic* pt. 8, JWO, 495.



commented:

The Spirit's coming, and being sent by our Lord from the Father, to testify of him, are personal characters, and plainly distinguish him from the Father and the Son; and his title as the *Spirit of truth*, together with his proceeding from the Father, can agree to none but a divine person. And that he proceeds from the Son, as well as from the Father, may be fairly argued from his being called "the Spirit of Christ", I Peter i.11; and from his being here said to be sent by Christ from the Father, as well as sent by the Father in his name.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently Wesley believed that the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son helped retain the unity of the Godhead, although Wesley never pressed the issue. Kenneth Collins' study on John Wesley supported the understanding that Wesley believed the filioque clause added strength to the unity of the Godhead.<sup>4</sup> From this it is possible to see that Wesley did not slip into subordinationist tendencies within the Trinity. This is further confirmed in his comment on I John 5:8 regarding the trinitarian relationship. The unity is in the essential substance which includes knowledge, will and testimony:

*And these three are one*-Even as those two, the Father and the Son, are one, John x.30. Nothing can separate the Spirit from the Father and the Son. If he were not one with the Father and the Son, the apostle ought to have said, *The Father and the Word*, who are one, *and the Spirit*, are two. But this is contrary to the whole tenor of revelation. It remains that *these three are one*. They are one in essence, in knowledge, in will, and in their testimony.<sup>5</sup>

There is thus certainty in Wesley's language that he was Augustinian in the order of the trinitarian revelation. The oneness is first, then comes the threeness.

The Wesleyan trinitarian prayer confirms the understanding of the economic unity of the Father, the Son and the Spirit:

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<sup>3</sup> ENNT: John 15: 26.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Collins, *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley's Homiletical Theology*, (Wilmore, Kentucky: Wesley Heritage Press, 1993), 61-62, "...to fail to see the procession of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son would unnecessarily separate the Son from the Spirit with the result that the unity and harmony of the Godhead would be marred."

<sup>5</sup> ENNT: I John 5:8.

Unto God the Father, who first loved us, and made us accepted in the Beloved; unto God the Son, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; unto God the Holy Ghost, who sheddeth the love of God abroad in our hearts, be all love and all glory for time and for eternity!<sup>6</sup>

Wesley accepted the biblical formulation that God is love and that love is known in a trinitarian manner by the Father, Son, and Spirit.

## B. Introduction to the Work of the Holy Spirit

It is important to understand the spiritual condition of eighteenth century England as John Wesley observed it through his travels. No one travelled the British Isles as did John Wesley and he observed that there was a form of religion in the Church of England but without evidence that the Christian faith had an impact in the life of people. His continual comments pertained to the hope that the Methodist revival would touch the lives of common people and he believed that the truth contained in correct historic Christian doctrine could affect people, change them and thus, there would be experiential evidence of the truth of Christian doctrine.

The Spirit's inner work in a person's life was crucial to John Wesley. Wesley's understanding that God's grace was extended to all meant that what God had promised to humanity, i.e., salvation, included an inward experience. Wesley stated, "What Christianity (considered as doctrine) promised is accomplished in my soul. And Christianity, considered as an inward principle, is the completion of all the promises."<sup>7</sup>

John Wesley constantly appealed to historic theology for confirmation of the

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<sup>6</sup> *The Love of God* III. 8 (BE) 4:345.

<sup>7</sup> *Letter to Conyers Middleton* Section II. 11; Dec. 30, 1745 (Telford, Vol. II, 383).

inward work of the Holy Spirit. He understood the complications that appeared in the Church's theological history regarding inward experience, yet the truth, he believed, was preserved in the Church through the superintendency of God. In his letter to Conyers Middleton he did not question the value of history or the contribution made by the Church's great theologians but Wesley was convinced that God was also active in the unlettered and illiterate people; Wesley believed that God had not neglected them. In strong and pointed language Wesley referred to the value of Christianity as an experience available to all people. He summarised his position in this manner: "And this I conceive to be the strongest evidence of the truth of Christianity. I do not undervalue the traditional evidence. Let it have its place and its due honour. It is highly serviceable in its kind and in its degree. And yet I cannot set it on a level such as this."<sup>8</sup> It is possible to see the tension in Wesley's thinking. While he defended the historic doctrines of the Church, he was also certain that those doctrines of truth were of little value if they had become sterile in the lives of people.

Wesley believed that in his day the technicalities of doctrine had become separated from personal relationships. As he stated, "The traditional evidence of Christianity stands, as it were, a great way off; and therefore, although it speaks loud and clear, yet makes a less lively impression." He then added the remark, "Whereas the inward evidence is intimately present to all persons at all times and in all places."<sup>9</sup> Thus he identified that human spiritual experience may be real even when a person does not have a complete understanding of the technicalities of doctrine. Clearly, the priority was the inward work of the Spirit which was valid even if a person had not an

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<sup>8</sup> *Letter to Conyers Middleton* Section II. 12, Jan. 4-24, 1749 (Telford Vol. 11, 383).

<sup>9</sup> *Letter to Conyers Middleton* Section III. 1, Jan. 4-24, 1749, 383.



astute theological mind. Wesley's confidence in the inward work of the Spirit was such that the person who knows the inward evidence will "stand firm and unshaken."<sup>10</sup> In this regard, Wesley believed that he had not departed from the tradition of the Church and he listed supporters of this position from the Greek and Latin Patristic writers.<sup>11</sup>

John Wesley preferred the term 'inspiration' to describe the indispensable work of the Holy Spirit. He accepted it as the scriptural word, the word used by the Church, and the best word. Inspiration was equivalent to 'breathing' and, according to Wesley, had the advantage of bearing a meaning that conveyed an understanding of an encounter between God and humanity. God initiated the encounter, or, as Wesley stated, "God, as Spirit, acts upon your spirit."<sup>12</sup>

His letter to Mr. Potter defined the work of the Spirit as, "...that inward assistance of the Holy Ghost which 'helps our infirmities, enlightens our understanding, rectifies our will, comforts, purifies, and sanctifies us.'"<sup>13</sup> In the same letter the explanation is given that regeneration is the work of the Spirit and is distinct from the objective work of righteousness accomplished by Christ,<sup>14</sup> yet the inner work of the Spirit is integrated to the overall Christological work as revealed in scripture and the doctrines of the Church of England.<sup>15</sup>

Wesley explained the foundation of Methodism, in relation to the Holy Spirit, in his Letter to 'John Smith'. When 'John Smith' used the term *Perceptible*

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<sup>10</sup> *Letter to Conyers Middleton* Section III. 4, Jan. 4-24, 1749, 384.

<sup>11</sup> *Letter to Conyers Middleton* Section III. 11-12, Jan. 4-24, 1749, 387-388.

<sup>12</sup> *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* V. 28 (Jackson VIII, 107).

<sup>13</sup> *Letter to Mr. Potter* 7, Nov. 4, 1758 (Telford Vol. IV, 39).

<sup>14</sup> *Letter to Mr. Potter* 3, Nov. 4, 1745, 38.

<sup>15</sup> *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* 29 (Jackson VIII, 107-108).

*Inspiration*, Wesley interpreted the expression:

But be pleased to observe what we mean thereby. We mean that inspiration of God's Holy Spirit whereby He fills us with righteousness, peace, and joy, with love to Him and to all mankind. And we believe it cannot be, in the nature of things, that a man should be filled with this peace and joy and love by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit without perceiving it as clearly as he does the sun.

This is (so far as I understand them) the main doctrine of the Methodists. This is the substance of what we all preach. And I will believe none is a true Christian till he experiences it; and consequently, That people at all hazards must be convinced of this-yea, though that conviction at first unhinge them for a season. For it is better that they should be perplexed and terrified now than they should sleep on and awake in hell.<sup>16</sup>

In that statement Wesley asserted the personal element of Methodist teaching and doctrine. It was the Spirit that brought humanity into a genuine encounter with the triune God. This meant for Wesley, that the work of the Spirit was perceptible which would then generate God's grace into a person's life through faith. The work of the Spirit advanced a person beyond acceptance of Creeds and doctrines of the Church. It must be remembered that Wesley did not discount historical formulation, he considered them integral, yet, not all people were familiar with historic Creeds and precise theology and yet they were not to be discounted as genuine Christians.

When Dr. Rutherford questioned whether a person can have an "inward feeling" which would confirm the experience of the Holy Spirit, Wesley answered by listing two suggested criteria of the evidence of an inward experience:

- 1) The fruit of His ordinary influences are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness;
- 2) Whoever has these, inwardly feels them; and if he understands his Bible, he discerns them from whence they come. Observe what he inwardly feels is these

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<sup>16</sup> *Letter to 'John Smith'*, Dec. 30, 1745 (Telford Vol. 11, 54).

fruits themselves; whence they come from he learns from the Bible.<sup>17</sup>

Wesley then added, "This is my doctrine concerning inward feelings, and has been for above these forty years."

### C. Wesley and the German Moravians

Subsequent to the May 24, 1738 Aldersgate experience Wesley made a trip to Herrnhut to visit the Moravians. While there Wesley recorded the conversations and experiential testimonies he heard. He related the account of Michael Linnear, a man he identified as the 'Eldest of the Church,' or the man of the highest office. Wesley's reference was to Linnear's spiritual struggles on assurance of salvation and, subsequently, full assurance. Wesley quoted from Linnear's testimony which contained the words, "Indeed, the leading of the Spirit is different in different souls. His more usual method, I believe, is to give, in one and the same moment, the forgiveness of sins and a full assurance of that salvation. Yet in many He works as He did in me - giving first the remission of sins, and, after some weeks or months or years, the full assurance of it." Then Wesley offered his own evaluation of this testimony by adding, "This great truth was further confirmed to me the next day by the conversation I had with David Nitschmann..." The *Journal* proceeded to give the testimonies of several others at Herrnhut. Wesley concluded that the experience of others should require a not too rigid stand on the manner in which the Spirit worked in particular people.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Letter to Dr. Rutherford*, Mar. 28, 1768 (Telford V, 363).

<sup>18</sup> *The Journal of John Wesley*, Aug. 8, 1738 (Curnock II, 37).



#### D. The Work of the Spirit

Colin Williams' mid-twentieth century study on John Wesley's theology was correct when Williams asserted:

The Christocentric nature of the work is made quite clear. His (Holy Spirit) main task is to help us receive Christ as lord and to reveal to us the truth concerning Christ. None can believe in Christ, except by the 'experimental assurance' given by the Holy Spirit, and this assurance is made available to us as the Spirit illumines our hearts when we read the Scriptures and hear the word preached.<sup>19</sup>

Wesley maintained the position that the work of salvation was the effect of the concerted energy within the trinitarian communion. The whole doctrine of salvation was a trinitarian operation, yet, though each Person could be distinguished, Wesley was careful to keep the economic trinitarian work in close relationship. A lengthy quote from *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* demonstrates this and emphasises the work of the Spirit:

The author of faith and salvation is God alone. It is he that works in us both to will and to do. He is the sole Giver of every good gift, and the sole Author of every good work. There is no more of power than of merit in man; but as all merit is in the Son of God, in what he has done and suffered for us, so all power is in the Spirit of God. And therefore every man, in order to believe unto salvation, must receive the Holy Ghost. This is essentially necessary to every Christian, not in order to his working miracles, but in order to faith, peace, joy, and love,-the ordinary fruits of the Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

Wesley went on to add: "But however it be expressed, it is certain that all true faith, and the whole work of salvation, every good thought, word, and work, is altogether by the operation of the Spirit of God."

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<sup>19</sup> Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today: A Study of the Wesleyan Tradition in the Light of Current Theological Dialogue*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 98-99.

<sup>20</sup> *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* Part I. I. 6 (Jackson VIII, 49).

## 1. Preventing Grace: The Doctrine of Creation and the Holy Spirit

Wesley's understanding of salvation was based in the atonement of Christ which was the revelation of God's favour upon humanity. The understanding of preventing grace began with the work of Christ which was universal in scope. As A. Skevington Wood stated, "God's salvation may be extended to all because his grace is already incipiently at work in all."<sup>21</sup> But it was the work of the Holy Spirit that brought the benefit to humanity. This grace of God began to work before a person's awareness. Wesley called this 'preventing grace'. This concept, Wesley believed, created an alternative to a deterministic understanding of human response. Accordingly, preventing grace maintained human responsibility in every aspect of life, yet, humanity, according to Wesley, did not live in a natural state of free-will. Humanity needed to respond to God's grace only by God initiating the response. It was only when a person constantly refused God's grace that the human mind could be 'seared' from the grace of God. Free-will was thus not a natural state but a gift from God. Wesley demonstrated his Augustinian roots and expressed his view in this manner:

But I do not carry free will so far: (I mean, not in moral things:) Natural free-will, in the present state of mankind, I do not understand: I only assert, that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light "which enlightens every man that cometh into the world."<sup>22</sup>

Kenneth Collins identified John 1:9 as John Wesley's favourite text for working through an understanding of free-will and preventing grace.<sup>23</sup> From this text

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<sup>21</sup> A. Skevington Wood, "The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace," in Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *Grace Unlimited*, (Minneapolis: The Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1975), 216.

<sup>22</sup> *Predestination Calmly Considered* 45 (Jackson X, 229-230).

<sup>23</sup> Collins, 64. It may be more appropriate to describe Wesley's position on freedom of the will as the freed will rather than a free will although Wesley never used the specific terminology of freed will.

Wesley concluded that every person has been given some knowledge of God though this knowledge may not be complete. From the biblical text he stated, “*Who lighteth every man*—By what is vulgarly termed natural conscience, pointing out at least the general lines of good and evil. And this light, if man did not hinder, would shine more and more to the perfect day.”<sup>24</sup> Preventing grace provided the explanation that God’s grace was extended to all humanity, not to a particular group within humanity. It also was a means to defend the position that God’s grace could be resisted.

Herbert McGonigle lists several sources for Wesley’s doctrine of preventing grace. Such diverse people as John Ellis, Isaac Watts, Richard Baxter, Bishop John Pearson, William Tilly, and Robert Barclay all contributed in some measure to his development of the doctrine.<sup>25</sup> A brief summary of the trinitarian basis of preventing grace was stated by Wesley in this manner:

The general manner wherein it pleases God to set it up in the heart is this: A sinner, being drawn by the love of the Father, enlightened by the Son, (“the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”), and convinced of sin by the Holy Ghost: through the preventing grace which is given him freely, cometh weary and heavy laden, and casteth all his sins upon Him that is “mighty to save”. He receiveth from Him true, living faith.<sup>26</sup>

Wesley did not believe that a person had a natural ability to discover God. His doctrine of original sin prevented him from reaching such a conclusion. If a person responded to God it was because God had created such a response. But the work of God could occur over a long period of time. This is what he meant by preventing

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<sup>24</sup> ENNT: John 1:9.

<sup>25</sup> Herbert McGonigle, *John Wesley’s Doctrine of Preventive Grace*, (Ilkeston: The Wesley Fellowship), 5-13. John Wesley’s use of preventing grace began early in his theological life and was grounded in William Tilly’s *Sixteen Sermons* (1712) preached at Oxford University; see Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley’s Evangelical Arminianism*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 320-321.

<sup>26</sup> *Abridgements of Various Works*, (Jackson XIV, 212).



grace, a grace that went before the apprehension of saving faith. Wesley described this process in these words: "No, it is not nature but the Son of God that is 'the light, which lighteneth every man which cometh into the world.' So that we may say to every human creature, 'He', not nature 'hath shown thee, O man, what is good.' And it is his Spirit who giveth thee an inward check, who causeth thee to feel uneasy, when thou walketh in any instance contrary to the light which he hath given thee."<sup>27</sup>

John Wesley interpreted Rom. 7:12 as a reference to God's general moral law given to all humanity. With determined intent Wesley asserted that the moral law was the "heart of God disclosed to man;"<sup>28</sup> this was the law that was "holy, just, and good."<sup>29</sup> In the final section of the sermon Wesley discussed the purpose of such a moral law. He began by insisting that it was designed to convince the world of sin. "This," he stated, "is indeed the peculiar work of the Holy Ghost, who can work it without means at all, or by whatever means it pleaseth him, however insufficient in themselves, or even improper to produce such an effect."<sup>30</sup> It is in this sense that humanity stands guilty before God since the moral law is by God's Spirit given to all humanity. Harald Lindström explained that preventing grace was a key to Wesley's concept of God, in reality, showing favour to all humanity.<sup>31</sup>

Wesley believed that God's Spirit was the check on the moral conscience and this moral check was not peculiar to Christians. He asserted, "He is continually saying to every child of man, 'My son, give me thy heart'," <sup>32</sup> and, "Certainly, whether this is

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<sup>27</sup> *On Conscience* (BE) 3:482.

<sup>28</sup> *The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law* II. 3 (BE) 2:4-19

<sup>29</sup> *The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law* III. 1: 10.

<sup>30</sup> *The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law* IV. 1:15.

<sup>31</sup> Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification*, (Wilmore, Kentucky: The Francis Asbury Press, 1946, 1980), 46, "In the last resort the doctrine is based on his conception of God."

<sup>32</sup> *Spiritual Idolatry* I. 3 (BE) 3:105.

natural or superadded by the grace of God, it is found, at least in some small degree, in every child of man. Something of this is found in every human heart, passing sentence concerning good and evil not only in all Christians, but in all Mohametans, all pagans, yea the vilest of savages.”<sup>33</sup>

Thus the Spirit is at work prior to human awareness. This was a continuation of Wesley’s explanation of preventing grace, it was a reference to the work of the Spirit, because of Christ’s atonement, to preserve humanity from complete destruction. It is clear that Wesley maintained a full respect for God’s initiatory work of the Spirit, and technically his position was not Pelagianism since he combined preventing grace with Augustine’s concept of original sin. Wesley actually believed he had found partial support for this in Augustine. Although Wesley recognised that the Augustinian system was not in general agreement with this particular proposal he quoted from Sermon 169, xi (13): “*Qui fecit nos sine nobis, non salvabis nos sine nobis*, ‘he that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves’.”<sup>34</sup>

Wesley was careful to ground his doctrine of the superintendency of the Holy Spirit in the doctrine of creation. Wesley was aware of the deist tendency to accept a God of creation but such a God was absent from creation. Wesley had read Voltaire, Rousseau, and Hume, and against their deist proposals Wesley insisted, “On the contrary, we have the fullest evidence that the eternal, omnipresent, almighty, all-wise Spirit, as he created all things, so he continually superintends whatever he has created.”<sup>35</sup> The Spirit, according to Wesley, oversees the universe, time, and space.

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<sup>33</sup> *Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels* I. 1 (BE) 4:163.

<sup>34</sup> *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* II. 7 (BE) 3:208.

<sup>35</sup> *The Unity of the Divine Being* 21 (BE) 4:69.

The important implication is a positive relation between the doctrine of creation and redemption because of Wesley's rejection of limited atonement.<sup>36</sup>

From this there are further direct implications. The sinner seeking rest finds none but only sin. Hope is found only in the "blood of Jesus," then the person discovers forgiveness, and, the love of God is "shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit which is given unto him."<sup>37</sup> This led to another implication: "From this principle springs real, disinterested benevolence<sup>38</sup> given to all mankind, making him humble, meek, gentle to all men, easy to be entreated, to be convinced of what is right, and persuaded to what is good, inviolably patient, with a thankful acquiescence in every step of his adorable providence."

This meant that no one could accuse God of not dispensing grace to every person. God has offered grace in varying degrees in order that humanity would remain accountable and morally responsible in matters of life and behaviour. Wesley's thinking was stated in this manner:

Yet there is no excuse for those who continue in sin, and lay the blame upon their Maker by saying; 'It is God only that must quicken us; for we cannot quicken our own souls.' For allowing that all the souls of man are dead in sin by *nature*, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly

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<sup>36</sup> In a more recent explanation of this Colin Gunton made an important statement regarding limited atonement, redemption, and creation: "First of all the relation of creation and redemption is thrown out of kilter. It was due to Augustine that the doctrine of predestination as the choosing of a limited number of people from the mass of the lost came to take hold, and the associated view that salvation meant not the redemption of man in and with the whole created order, but apart from it, sometimes even out of it. Redemption thus becomes a human not a universal project," in 'The Doctrine of Creation,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed., Colin E. Gunton, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 150.

<sup>37</sup> *The Unity of the Divine Being* 22: 70.

<sup>38</sup> Wesley frequently noted his appreciation of François Fénelon. The French mystic commented on two types of love. One is a love based on what we receive from God, the other is the love of God because of who God is. According to Fénelon the second type is preferable. Fénelon called this 'disinterested love', *Christian Perfection*, (London: Harper and Row, 1947), 140.



called 'natural conscience'. But this is not natural; it is more properly called 'preventing grace'. Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. Every one has sooner or later good desires, although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root or produce any considerable fruit. Every one has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. And everyone, unless he be one of the small number whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience. So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.<sup>39</sup>

The importance of preventing grace was crucial to John Wesley. In the early years of the revival he offered this idea to 'John Smith'. In his June 25, 1746 letter he stated, "I believe firmly, and that in the most literal sense, that 'without God we can do nothing'; that we cannot think, or speak, or move an hand or an eye without the concurrence of the divine energy; and that all our natural faculties are God's gift; nor can the meanest be exerted without the assistance of the Spirit."<sup>40</sup> Here is identified in clear language humanity's complete inability to accomplish anything without the direct intervention of God through the Spirit. Wesley's emphasis on the personal intervention of God meant that without that intervention creation would be reduced to nothingness, or at least, to inactivity.

Because of Wesley's approach he believed he had given a response to limited atonement since preventing grace had as its goal salvation and this was given to all people. It is well known that Wesley accepted universal atonement while not all responded to God's free grace. Still preventing grace was the term Wesley preferred to use to indicate that universal atonement has been offered by God to all humanity.

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<sup>39</sup> *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* III. 4 (BE) 3:207; in the *Letter to John Mason*, Nov. 21, 1776 (Telford V, 71) the same idea is presented: "no man living is without preventing grace."

<sup>40</sup> *Letter to 'John Smith'*, Nov. 21, 1746 (Telford II, 71).

Wesley then indicated that initial repentance, or awareness of sin, was not salvific but a conscious sorrow for sin. Only after God had created a response in a human could there be saving repentance. Wesley thus accepted two types of repentance, the first non-salvific, the second salvific.

## 2. Convincing Grace and the Holy Spirit

In the sermon, *Witness of the Spirit, I*, Wesley described the work of the Spirit as leading to saving repentance, that is, a conviction of sin which precedes the awareness of pardon.<sup>41</sup> Also, a person is born of God prior to any awareness of it. The person who claims to be a Christian but has not experienced any inward change, which means, “he has never yet known God,” is the person who has confused the natural impression from the true witness of the Spirit. Wesley referred to this as having “mistaken the voice of nature for the voice of God.”<sup>42</sup>

From his sermon *On Conscience* we discover that Wesley believed that the Spirit was continually at work in humanity. He stated, “In order to the very existence of a good conscience, as well as the continuance of it, the continual influence of the Spirit of God is absolutely required.”<sup>43</sup> Kenneth Collins summarised Wesley’s position on the illumination of the Spirit, in three parts, with quotes from *On Conscience*:

First, the Spirit teaches us the meaning of God’s Word which, at times, is not so readily apparent to sinfully diseased hearts; illumination and instruction are therefore required. Second, the Spirit makes us aware of our own lives and dispositions, “bringing all our thoughts, words, and actions to remembrance.”

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<sup>41</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, I, II.* 4 (BE) 1:278

<sup>42</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, I, II.* 5 (BE) 1:279.

<sup>43</sup> *On Conscience* 13 (BE) 3:486.

And finally, the good places of the Holy Spirit are requisite in order to perceive the agreement of our lives with “the commandments of God.”<sup>44</sup>

In order to prepare the heart to receive God’s grace in salvation, Wesley believed that the Holy Spirit’s task continued to illuminate or bring a person out of spiritual sleep. As he commented, “By some awful providence, or by His Word applied with the demonstration of his Spirit, God touches the heart of him that lay asleep in darkness and in the shadow of death. He is terribly shaken out of his sleep.”<sup>45</sup> One can note the seriousness of sin in this statement; convincing a person of sin does not come easily, it is a difficult realisation to deal with the devastation of sin. Wesley was convinced of this and for that reason the work of the Spirit was necessary. The work of the Spirit, at this point, was prior to a full awareness of salvation, yet Wesley was convinced that a type of initial repentance was apparent at this stage. He called it “legal repentance.” His *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* offered this explanation:

Repentance is of two sorts: that which is termed *legal*, and that which is styled *evangelical* repentance. The former, which is the same that is spoken of here, is a thorough conviction of sin. The latter is a change of heart (and consequently of life) from all sin to all holiness.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. Saving Grace and the Holy Spirit

John Wesley intended throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century Methodist revival to steer a course which did not include the purely subjectivism of ‘Enthusiasm’ nor the pure rationalism of the anti-supernaturalists. His particular direction in line with historic

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<sup>44</sup> Collins, 66.

<sup>45</sup> *The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption* II. 1 (BE) 1:255.

<sup>46</sup> *ENNT*: Matt. 3:8.



Christianity was never easy when a revival that spans multiple years reaches people of all ages, social class, education, and temperament. Wesley was aware of this problem yet his two published sermons on *The Witness of the Spirit* (1746 and 1767) were indicative of his objective approach to the work of the Holy Spirit and inner renewal. The sermons maintained that the priority of the Person of the Holy Spirit preceded the understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The beginning of *The Witness of the Spirit, I* is an attack on ‘enthusiasts’, “people who have mistaken the voice of their own imagination for this ‘witness of the Spirit’ of God.”<sup>47</sup> But he added that “reasonable men” have turned to the other extreme of rejecting the witness of the Spirit as a personal experience.<sup>48</sup>

In *The Witness of the Spirit, I* Wesley proceeded to identify the marks of the Spirit in a person’s life. These marks were not only subconscious but were visible. He stated that the idea meant: “the ease of a meek and quiet spirit;” “you love justice, and delight in God;” “you love your neighbour as yourself;” “you are kindly affectioned to all mankind and full of gentleness and longsuffering;” “the keeping of his commandments;” “your conscience informs you from day to day if you do not take the name of God within your lips unless with seriousness and devotion;” “you remember the sabbath day;” “you honour your father and mother;” “you possess your body in sanctification and honour.”<sup>49</sup>

He went on to explain that this is “a consciousness that we are inwardly conformed by the Spirit of God to the image of his Son.”<sup>50</sup> The result is a personal

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<sup>47</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, I*, proem. 1 (BE) 1:269.

<sup>48</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, I*, proem. 2:270.

<sup>49</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, I*, I.5: 273.

<sup>50</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, I*, I. 6: 274.

knowledge of forgiveness and reconciliation with God.<sup>51</sup> Importantly, the witness of the Spirit experientially precedes our conscious awareness. Wesley stated, “we must be holy of heart and holy in life before we can be conscious that we are so.”<sup>52</sup> Then the co-operation of the person is applicable. Wesley then added the personal recognition by commenting, “But we must love God before we can be totally holy at all; this being the root of all holiness.”<sup>53</sup> By this process of objective sanctification followed by inner sanctification, the Spirit reveals how the person is being inwardly and outwardly changed.<sup>54</sup>

John Wesley stated that God is the source and author of faith and salvation. God, then, is the author of every good work for it is outside the ability of humanity to do good works without God’s intervention, “All power is in the Spirit of God.”<sup>55</sup> Wesley then asserted, “in order to ‘believe unto salvation’, a person must receive the Holy Ghost.” Wesley again affirmed the Christian historic understanding of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit it is not possible for humanity to do good acts or have good intentions. But Wesley did add that the work of the Spirit can be varied according to the requirement of a person: “Sometimes He acts more particularly on the understanding, opening or enlightening it, (as Scripture speaks) and revealing, unveiling, discovering to us ‘the deep things of God’;” “Sometimes He acts on the wills and affections of men; withdrawing them from evil, inclining them to good, inspiring (breathing, as it were) good thoughts into them;” “...the whole work of salvation, every good thought, word, and work, is altogether by the operation of the

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<sup>51</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit*, I, I. 7: 274.

<sup>52</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit*, I, I. 8: 274.

<sup>53</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit*, I, I. 8:274.

<sup>54</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit*, I, I. 10:275.

<sup>55</sup> *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* Part I. 1. 6 (Jackson VIII, 49).

Spirit of God.”<sup>56</sup>

John Wesley was aware of the criticism raised against the witness of the Spirit. He recognised that people could claim the witness of the Spirit under false assumptions, yet even the abuse of the experience did not mean that the experience was false. He recognised the criticism by stating, “But madmen, French prophets, and enthusiasts of every kind have imagined they experience the witness.” He then responded, “They have so, and perhaps not a few of them did, although they did not retain it long. But if they did not, this is no proof at all that others have not experienced it as a madman’s imagining himself a king does not prove that there are no real kings.”<sup>57</sup>

The record, or testimony, of our salvation is given by the Holy Spirit and becomes a conscious awareness in a person’s life. The testimony of the Spirit is combined with the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. “We assert...that the fruit of the Spirit immediately springs from this testimony,”<sup>58</sup> he then added that there is a dynamic to the process which is evident of his practical concerns. Wesley believed that there is a testimony and a fruit of the Spirit but they are not equal at all times; “Not always, indeed, in the same degree, even when the testimony is first given, and much less afterwards.”<sup>59</sup>

At the practical level Wesley asked, “But what is the testimony of God’s Spirit which is superadded to and conjoined with this? How does he ‘bear witness with our spirits that we are children of God?’” His answer did not come in a formula style. He

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<sup>56</sup> *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* Part I. 1. 6, 49.

<sup>57</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, II*, IV. 2 (BE) 1:293.

<sup>58</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, II*, II. 7: 282.

<sup>59</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, II*, II. 7: 282.



answered, "It is hard to find words in the language of men to explain 'the deep things of God'. Indeed there are none that will adequately express what the children of God experience." He proceeded to explain, "...the testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly 'witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God'; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."<sup>60</sup>

Again, the summary of this is stated as, "the testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the souls of believers, whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirit that they are children of God."<sup>61</sup> The question was not about a testimony of the Spirit but how the Spirit worked. Wesley insisted that it could be direct without mediation. At the end of the sermon Wesley dealt with the problem of the experience of powerful temptation and the relation to the fruit of the Spirit. His comment indicated that, "however this fruit may be clouded for a while during the time of strong temptation, so that it does not appear to the tempted person while 'Satan is sifting him as wheat', yet the substantial part of it remains, even under the thickest cloud."<sup>62</sup>

John Wesley's discussion with 'John Smith' dealt with the witness of the Spirit as a constant witness. Wesley proposed three propositions:

- 1) A man feels in himself the testimony of God's Spirit that he is a child of God; and he can then no more deny or doubt thereof than the shining of the sun at noonday.
- 2) After a time this testimony is withdrawn.

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<sup>60</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, I, I. 7: 274.*

<sup>61</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, II, V. 1 (BE) 1: 296.*

<sup>62</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit, II, V. 4 (BE) 1: 298.*

3) He begins to reason within himself concerning it; next, to doubt whether that testimony was from God; and, perhaps, in the end to deny that it was. And yet he may be all this time in every other respect 'of sound memory as well as understanding.'<sup>63</sup>

'John Smith' questioned whether a person who once had the witness of the Spirit could doubt the experience.<sup>64</sup> Wesley then argued that the propositions may be debated but the propositions are not contradictions. Wesley's answer was, "I verily believe, as it was the God of heaven who once shone in his heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, so it is the god of this world who hath now blinded his heart so that the glorious light cannot shine upon it."<sup>65</sup>

The meaning is expressed in the context of participation. Since God has initiated salvation, humanity consequently bears the responsibility to participate in that grace. When the "god of this world" tempts the believer and the believer refuses the continual participation with God, the witness of the Spirit can be diminished or lost. Yet, Wesley went on to assert that "every Christian believer hath a perceptible testimony of the Spirit that he is a child of God."<sup>66</sup> This was based on Rom. 8:16 which describes the way of normal Christian life, it is not an extraordinary experience. Wesley, in writing to 'John Smith', argued that historical support of the conscious experience of the Holy Spirit can be located in John Chrysostom and Origen. The experience of the witness of the Spirit, Wesley continually repeated, was to be a conscious experience.

The question of the Spirit's immediate awareness was constant to Wesley's questioners. Richard Thompson objected to the idea that a person may know that sins

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<sup>63</sup> *Letter to 'John Smith'*. 4 (BE) 26: 230.

<sup>64</sup> *Letter to 'John Smith'*. 5: 231.

<sup>65</sup> *Letter to 'John Smith'*. 5: 231.

<sup>66</sup> *Letter to 'John Smith'*. 6: 231.

are forgiven by the witness of the Spirit. In Wesley's reply he reasserted his conviction that "the whole Christian Church in the first centuries enjoyed it;" that, "all the Reformed Churches in Europe did once believe" in the divine evidence of sins forgiven.<sup>67</sup> Then Wesley added from human experience, "when God pardons a mourning, broken-hearted sinner, His mercy obliges Him to another act - to witness to his spirit that He has pardoned him."

Wesley continued to comment on this by not creating a hard and fast rule. He maintained that justifying faith was not to be equated with experience of conviction; and, a person who claims not to have any experience of justification may be conceivably a Christian, but then these words are added at the close of the letter, "still I believe the proper Christian faith, which purifies the heart, implies such a conviction."

The second sermon with the title *The Witness of the Spirit* recognised the problem of the delusion of falsely acknowledging the witness of the Spirit. Wesley asserted, "Let no one rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness."<sup>68</sup> Then came the reference to the Spirit not fully revealed but only partially revealed through prevenient grace. This precedes the fuller or complete expression. Wesley stated, "Yea, there may be a degree of long-suffering, of gentleness, of fidelity, meekness, temperance (not a shadow thereof, but a real degree, by the preventing grace of God) before we are 'accepted in the Beloved', and consequently before we have a testimony of our acceptance." The genuine evidence, he asserted was "all inward and outward holiness." The meaning of this was clear to Wesley. A person

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<sup>67</sup> *Letter to Richard Thompson*, July 25, 1755 (BE) 26:575.

<sup>68</sup> *The Witness of the Spirit*, II V.4 (BE) 1: 298.



should not only claim to be inwardly changed by the Spirit, there must also be the outward evidence in the life of holiness.

Wesley's sermon, *The First-fruits of the Spirit*, dealt with deliverance from the guilt and anxiety produced by sin and yet established the identity of the Christian. In the sermon Wesley was particularly concerned with wilful sins committed by the believer. The sermon identified the classic theology of the immediate reception of the Spirit in the Christian life.<sup>69</sup> The result of the Spirit's presence was to empower the believer to walk after the Spirit, not after the sinful nature.<sup>70</sup> Then, Wesley explained, the Christian is effected by the Spirit to love God and neighbour, and is led to a participation through holiness into the life of God.<sup>71</sup> This meant a visible evidence of the empowering activity of the Spirit. As Wesley indicated Christians are to give, "full proof to all mankind that they are indeed actuated by the same Spirit 'which raised Jesus from the dead.'"<sup>72</sup>

The sermon *Scriptural Christianity* was based on Acts 4:31 and Wesley equated the idea of being filled with the Holy Spirit with having "the mind which was in Christ."<sup>73</sup> The result is disciples who are recognised as having crucified "the flesh with its affections and lusts;" this results in "inward change to fulfil all righteousness." Wesley then explained how this applied to the believer in personal language of faith made alive resulting in daily growth in grace.<sup>74</sup> Part of John Wesley's practical agenda was to assert that this was typical of the early church life.

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<sup>69</sup> *The First-fruits of the Spirit*, proem. 2 (BE) 1: 234.

<sup>70</sup> *The First-fruits of the Spirit* I. 2: 235-236

<sup>71</sup> *The First-fruits of the Spirit* I. 4: 236.

<sup>72</sup> *The First-fruits of the Spirit* I. 6 (BE) 1: 237.

<sup>73</sup> *Scriptural Christianity* proem. 4 (BE) 1: 160.

<sup>74</sup> *Scriptural Christianity* I. 8 (BE) 1: 164.

At the same time this was not individualistic but communal. The second section of the sermon dealt with the unrelenting conviction of the united call to mission by those filled with the Holy Spirit. The third section of the sermon led to the conclusion that that would result in Christianity overflowing throughout the earth.

The sermon portrays the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in Wesley's theology. The Spirit serves two functions; one is in the life of the believer, the other is in the mission of the church. Wesley advocated a real visibility of the work of the Spirit. The significance of the objective work of the Spirit is clearly emphasised, the objective is contrasted to subjective individualism, thus a common united thread was recognised in the work of the Spirit in the Church.

In the sermon, *The Witness of Our Own Spirit*, the Spirit works within the conscience of each person.<sup>75</sup> Wesley reiterated his common theme of the inner life of the person, "the joy of a Christian does not arise from any blindness of conscience, from his not being able to discern good from evil."<sup>76</sup>

The First Annual Conference of the Methodist ministers was held on Monday, June 25, 1744. Albert Outler's editorial note on the Conference explained that the participants were free to ask any question and all were allowed to offer an opinion. But the final decisions were within John Wesley's own theological formulation. Outler indicated that "the final answers were always pronounced by Wesley himself in light of the discussion."<sup>77</sup> Question 4 was "What is faith?" The answer is, "a divine supernatural ελεγχος ('evidence'; 'manifestation'); it is "a spiritual sight of God and

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<sup>75</sup> *The Witness of Our Own Spirit* proem. 16 (BE) 1: 309-310.

<sup>76</sup> *The Witness of Our Own Spirit* proem. 18: 311.

<sup>77</sup> *JWO*, 135.

the things of God.” This is the faith by which a person is justified and pardoned. It is the effect of this faith that the Spirit gives witness. The effect, or witness of the Spirit, is immediate. Over forty years later Wesley would partially rescind this position. The immediate witness of the Spirit should not be pressed for fear of endangering a person’s spirituality.<sup>78</sup> Still Wesley was certain of the transformation a person would go through by the experience of justification and the witness of the Spirit. He described it as “ease after the pain, rest after trial, light after darkness - and from its immediate as well as distant fruits.” This can be compared with the sermon *Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels*. The sermon described a person born of God as a person who has experienced the presence of the Spirit. Wesley used the language from Rom. 5:5 and identified Christians as the people who have, “the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, which is given unto them.”<sup>79</sup> It should not be missed that the work of the Spirit is immediate in the life of the believer.

#### 4. Sanctifying Grace and the Holy Spirit

Although there will be a fuller explanation of John Wesley’s understanding of Christian Holiness in the section on **Christ and the Office of Prophet**, a brief summary will be given here in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit. John Wesley, throughout his academic and evangelistic life, adhered to a constant discovery of the meaning of complete salvation. He wrote extensively on what holiness meant in this life and it became a controversial topic throughout his preaching and writing career.<sup>80</sup>

An outline of the overall summary can be expressed in these ideas:

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<sup>78</sup> *On Faith* I. 11 (BE) 3: 497.

<sup>79</sup> *Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels* I. 3 (BE) 4: 164.

<sup>80</sup> An example of his advice for lay people to instruct one another on the life of holiness is contained in a *Letter to Mrs Bennis*, Mar. 31, 1775 (Telford Vol. V, 315).



- i. That pardon (salvation begun) is received by faith producing works;
- ii. That holiness (salvation continued) is faith working by love;
- iii. That heaven (salvation finished) is the reward of this faith.<sup>81</sup>

In his *Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1748) he stated the idea more extensively:

By salvation I mean, not barely, according to vulgar notion, deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature: the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and, by consequence, all holiness of conversation.<sup>82</sup>

His use of terms to describe holiness is extensive. An example comes from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, the “perfect man, sanctified throughout,” “one in whom is ‘the mind which was in Christ,’” “one who ‘walketh as Christ also walked.’”<sup>83</sup> He regarded sanctifying grace as an inward change in a person. Wesley would state, “I believe it to be an inward thing, namely, the life of God in the soul of man; a participation in the divine nature; the mind that was in Christ; or, the renewal of our heart after the image of him that created us.”<sup>84</sup>

The Methodist Conference of 1744 gave an answer to the question of how to identify holiness in humanity. This was to be a constant affirmation repeated over and over by Wesley: “The loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our mind, and soul, and strength.”<sup>85</sup> Eventually Wesley preferred to identify holiness as “love excluding sin,”<sup>86</sup> or, “love expelling sin.”<sup>87</sup> However one accepts Wesley’s

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<sup>81</sup> *JWO*, 159.

<sup>82</sup> *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* I. 3 (Jackson, VIII, 47).

<sup>83</sup> *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* 15.4 (Jackson XI, 384).

<sup>84</sup> *The Journal of John Wesley*, Sept. 13, 1739 (Curnock 2, 275)

<sup>85</sup> *JWO*, 140.

<sup>86</sup> *The Scripture Way of Salvation* I. 9 (BE) 2: 160.

<sup>87</sup> *Letter to Walter Churchey*, Feb. 21, 1771 (Telford V, 223).

understanding, the question that is important is, how did he understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the continual life of holiness?

The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer was clearly given emphasis by Wesley. He would write:

From the time of our being 'born again', the gradual work of sanctification takes place. We are enabled 'by the Spirit to 'mortify the deeds of the body' (Rom. 8:11, 13) of our evil nature, and as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God. We go from grace to grace...It is thus that we wait for entire sanctification, for a full salvation.<sup>88</sup>

In his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* an integration of the Christian life and the work of the Spirit is developed. The similarity of the Spirit at work in justification and ongoing sanctification is elaborated with the words, "None therefore ought to believe that the work is done till there is added the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing his entire sanctification, as clearly as his justification."<sup>89</sup> He further stated in the same document, "But how do you know, that you are sanctified, saved from your inbred corruption? I can know it no otherwise that I know that I am justified. Hereby know we that we are of God, in either sense, by the Spirit at work in cleansing the believer and also in bearing witness to the experience."

Kenneth Collins concluded that the Spirit plays a role of three basic movements according to Wesley's theology: "first, a conviction of the sin which yet remains; second, purifying the heart and filling it with love; third, witnessing to and assuring the believer that the work is done."<sup>90</sup>

Important to John Wesley was the support he could find within the tradition of

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<sup>88</sup> *The Scripture Way of Salvation* I. 8 (BE) 2: 160.

<sup>89</sup> *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Jackson, XI, 402).

<sup>90</sup> Collins, 76.

the Church of England. In a letter to Dr. Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester, he reacted to the charge from the Bishop that he was a “modern fanatic.”<sup>91</sup> The letter eventually arrived at a discussion on the interrelated offices of the Holy Spirit. For his defence, Wesley turned to John Pearson, Bishop of Chester, long regarded as a staunch defender of orthodox, classic theology. A summary of the lengthy quote from John Pearson can be stated in three essential offices of the Spirit:

- i. Sanctification being opposed to our corruption, and answering fully to the latitude thereof, whatsoever of holiness and perfection is wanting in our nature must be supplied by the Spirit of God:
- ii. The Spirit’s role is “the renewing of man in all parts and faculties of his soul.”
- iii. The Spirit is “to lead, and govern us in our actions and conversation.”<sup>92</sup>

The Spirit is the source of sanctification, creates sanctification, and maintains sanctification for the believer. Included in this, as Wesley added from support in Pearson, that we receive assurance of our adoption as sons from the Spirit and the Spirit creates in us a sense of the “paternal love of God.”

## 5. The ‘Means of Grace’ and the Holy Spirit

John Wesley insisted that the Holy Spirit worked directly upon the life of a person to transform the person into greater likeness of Christ. This is unmediated grace. But God, according to Wesley, also worked through mediation. The Holy Spirit acted through God’s ordained ‘means of grace’ to create a divinely inspired change in a person or the church community. The sermon *The Means of Grace* is a response to quietism with its emphasis on waiting on God without any mediation. In the sermon

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<sup>91</sup> *Letter to Dr. Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester*, Nov. 26, 1762 (Telford IV, 340).

<sup>92</sup> *Letter to Dr. Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester*, (Telford IV, 367-377); cf. John Pearson, *An Exposition of the Creed*, art. VIII, (II), 448-451.



Wesley argued for a continuance in three particular means of grace; prayer, searching the scriptures, and the Lord's Supper. These are means of grace that mediate the presence of God. Wesley believed that the means of grace are not automatic bestowals of the presence of God. This is made abundantly clear in the sermon. He stated, "We allow likewise that all outward means whatever, if separate from the Spirit of God, cannot profit at all, cannot induce any degree either to the knowledge or love of God."<sup>93</sup> Wesley added, "And all outward things, unless he work in them and by them, are mere weak and beggarly elements. Whosoever therefore imagines there is any intrinsic *power* in any means whatsoever does greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God." Herbert McGonigle made the point, "Thus it is God's love for sinful men, mediated by a train of the means of grace, that brings the sinner to faith, therefore his salvation is all of faith, not of works."<sup>94</sup> The point was made by Wesley, near the end of the sermon, that God is sovereign and can choose to use whatever means of grace to bestow the Spirit upon humanity:

Yet still our wisdom is to follow the leadings of his providence and his Spirit; to be guided herein (more specifically as to the means wherein we ourselves seek the grace of God) partly by his outward providence, giving us the opportunity of using sometimes, our means, sometimes another; partly by our experience, which it is whereby his free Spirit is pleased most to work in our heart. And in the meantime the sure and general rule for all who groan for the salvation of God is this-whensoever opportunity serves, use all the means which God has ordained.<sup>95</sup>

## E. Conclusion

John Wesley defined the Person of the Holy Spirit within the trinitarian structure of

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<sup>93</sup> *The Means of Grace* II. 3 (BE) 1: 382.

<sup>94</sup> Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 141.

<sup>95</sup> *The Means of Grace* V. 3: 395.

the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in personal equality. Wesley was then able to incorporate the work of the Spirit into the activity of salvation. The Spirit continued the work of Christ's atonement through the renewal and restoration of the mind of the Christian along with the restoration of the Church, in community, leading to a mission oriented church. The Spirit worked through grace in the stages of preventing, convincing, saving, and sanctifying grace. Each stage began through the initiating effect of God and Wesley consistently preserved this way of describing the Person and work of the Spirit and he considered this to be a key to identifying the Methodist movement.

With the doctrine of God revealed through God's self-revelation, this Anglican priest paid particular attention to Christology that laid the foundation of salvation for all humanity. In the next section this will be explained as the Christological offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. Incorporated into these offices was the further work of the Spirit explained in renewal and restoration language. In developing his theology of salvation, Wesley entered into controversy and, at times, received severe criticism regarding the direction of his thought. Interestingly, he did not receive a lot of criticism for his trinitarian doctrine of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, except by those outside the classic, historic theology. But it will now be possible to evaluate John Wesley's doctrine of salvation in light of the previous discussion regarding his doctrine of God.

## Part Three: John Wesley and the Doctrine of Salvation

### I. Christ and the Priestly Office

#### A. Christ the High Priest in the *Epistle to the Hebrews* and the *Sermons*

This opening section on Christ as High Priest sets the foundation for Wesley's understanding of the priestly work of Christ. In laying the foundation it will be made clear that the basis of John Wesley's doctrine of the atonement is the doctrinal formulation of Jesus as human and divine. It was Wesley's interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which he believed to be written by Paul, that will offer, for this investigation, a framework for explaining the priestly office of Christ's work in the atonement. Wesley's study on Hebrews in the *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* was written in a small commentary and word study style. The approach was a verse by verse analysis but here we shall take a more systematic doctrinal approach beginning with Christology. Although Wesley objected directly to Socinian, or as he also described it, Arian theology, the controversy he encountered was not on Christ as High Priest but in the subsequent sections of the Priestly work of Christ.

The priestly office was understood in relation to the prophetic and kingly office and often in Wesley's writings the three offices were constructed in an integrative manner. An example of this is seen in his sermon *The Law Established through Faith, II*. In the sermon he stated:

To preach Christ as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed is to preach him not only as our great 'High Priest, taken from among men, and ordained for men, in things pertaining to God'; as such, 'reconciling us to God by his blood', and 'ever living to make intercession for us'; but likewise as the



Prophet of the Lord, 'who of God is made unto us wisdom', who by his word and his Spirit 'is with us always', 'guiding us into all truth'; yea, and as remaining a King for ever; as giving laws to all whom he has bought with his blood; as restoring those to the image of God whom he had first reinstated in his favour; as reigning in all believing hearts until he has 'subdued all things to himself'; until he hath utterly cast out all sin, and 'brought in everlasting righteousness.'<sup>1</sup>

Jesus is the 'God-Man' who is crowned with glory after suffering death. The universal consequences of Christ's priestly work was stated as applying, "*For every man* - That was or will be born into the world."<sup>2</sup> Since salvation is made available for all humanity, Christ is then "the entire and perfect revelation" of God<sup>3</sup> because the whole economy of salvation is from God and thus Hebrews did not present any understanding of the atonement that contradicted the OT. Later in the epistle Wesley emphasised by way of the 'type' created through Melchizedek that Christ was without father according to his human nature and without mother according to his divine nature. At the same time Christ never descended from the priestly lineage yet remains a priest forever.<sup>4</sup> Christ's humanness was a humanity in weakness and needed divine help: "Indeed, his human nature needed the support of Omnipotence: and for this he sent up *strong crying and tears.*"<sup>5</sup>

John Wesley insisted that the Incarnation was unique in its effect for the salvation of humanity. He stated the uniqueness of Christ in this manner; Christ was holy "with respect to God," harmless, "with respect to man," and sinless without "any sin in himself," and thus separate from sinners, "As well as free from sin."<sup>6</sup>

Since all of humanity is united in one humanity through Adam,<sup>7</sup> all are

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<sup>1</sup> *The Law Established through Faith, II*, I. 5 (BE) 2: 37-38.

<sup>2</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 2:9.

<sup>3</sup> ENNT: Hebrews. 1:1.

<sup>4</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 7:3.

<sup>5</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 5:7.

<sup>6</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 7:26

affected by sin. Accordingly, Wesley believed that the holiness and justice of God required the punishment of humanity in order to demonstrate God's complete abhorrence of sin. Humanity was to be punished and Christ assumed the consequences of sin in himself, though sinless; therefore, God must punish Christ. Wesley combined the idea of the punishment of Christ with the language of sin as dishonour to God. In reference to Christ Wesley commented, "...throughout his whole life, he showed that it was not the sufferings he was to undergo, but the dishonour that sin had done to so holy a God, that grieved his spotless soul."<sup>8</sup> It is clear that Wesley developed an Anselmic<sup>9</sup> understanding of sin as dishonour to God and he was explicit on this when he said concerning sin, debt, and humanity:

But what shall he give in exchange for his soul, which is forfeit to the just vengeance of God? 'Wherewithal shall he come before the Lord?' How shall he pay him that he oweth? Were he from this moment to perform the most perfect obedience to every command of God, this would make no amends for a single sin, for any one act of past disobedience: seeing he owes God all the service he is able to perform from this moment to all eternity, could he pay this it would make no manner of amends for what he ought to have done before. He sees himself therefore utterly helpless with regard to atoning for his past sins; utterly unable to make any amends to God, to pay any ransom for his own soul.<sup>10</sup>

This is repeated in the sermon *The Way to the Kingdom*:

Alas, thou canst do nothing, nothing that will in any wise make amends to God for one evil work or word or thought. If thou couldst now do all things well, if from this very hour, till thy soul should return to God, thou couldst perform perfect, uninterrupted obedience, even this would not atone for what is past. The not increasing thy debt would not discharge it. It would still remain as great as ever. Yea, the present and future obedience of all the men upon earth,

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<sup>7</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 1:11: "Are all of one - Partakers of one nature, from one parent, Adam."

<sup>8</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 5:7.

<sup>9</sup> In the tenth century Anselm described humanity's inability to repay for past sin because everything that a person does is already owed to God: "When you are rendering to God something which you owe him, even if you have not sinned, you ought not to reckon this to be recompense for what you owe him for sin. For you owe to God all the things to which you refer," *Why God Became Man* I. 20 in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, eds., Brian Davies and G.R. Evans, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> *Sermon on the Mount*, I, I. 5 (BE) 1: 478.

and all the angels in heaven, would never make satisfaction to the justice of God for one single sin.<sup>11</sup>

The emphasis is clear that satisfaction is to be made to God. This clarified Wesley's attempt to correct his one time Oxford student and Calvinist colleague, James Hervey, who had written that satisfaction was to be made to the law.<sup>12</sup> For Wesley, Hervey's comment gave too much authority to the law, an authority which should be reserved only for God.

For Wesley this led to the conclusion that the suffering of Christ was not only a suffering in death but suffering punishment from God. But this idea was not based in Anselm's thought. Anselm rejected the idea of the Father punishing the Son and Anselm was clear on this controversial point. The medieval theologian insisted that either God must punish evil or receive just payment. Christ was the just payment so punishment was not required.<sup>13</sup> For Anselm the critical point of the issue was posited in an 'either...or' fashion. Those who accepted the proposition that the Father punished the Son placed their position in the form of 'both...and'.

The proposed 'both...and' of payment and punishment was developed by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas constructed the punishment idea from Anselm's satisfaction model and Aquinas stated it in this manner:

Man was held captive in that he was enslaved to sin: *whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin*, and again, *by whom a man is overcome, of the same also is he the slave*. Since the devil overcame man by inducing him to sin man was in bondage to the devil. Then, also, man was held captive as to a debt of punishment, to the payment of which he was bound by divine justice; this, too, is a kind of bondage, for it is the mark of slavery to have done to you what you do not will.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Way to the Kingdom* II. 5 (BE) 1:228.

<sup>12</sup> *To James Hervey*, Oct. 15, 1756 (Telford III, 372).

<sup>13</sup> *Why God Became Man* I. 13.



Now because Christ's Passion was the sufficient and superabundant satisfaction for human guilt and the consequent debt of punishment, His Passion was a kind of price, which paid the cost of freeing us from both obligations.<sup>14</sup>

Brian Davies offered a comprehensive study of Aquinas' thought on the Incarnation and its purpose<sup>15</sup> and stated, "When Aquinas declares that we are freed from sin 'by Christ satisfying for us' he comes very close to Anselm's position. For one thing he believes that in certain circumstances there is a need for satisfaction."<sup>16</sup> For Aquinas, Christ then becomes the human substitute and is punished to fulfil God's righteousness. The infinite value of Christ's punishment was grounded in his divine nature. God can offer pardon to humanity because of Christ's representative divine nature (of infinite value) and his representative human nature (as effective for humanity).

John Wesley choose the 'both...and' proposition although it is important to note that though Wesley has been recognised as a reader and integrator of a wide variety of theological systems and models, and though there is strong evidence of his Anselmic tendency, there is no evidence of Wesley reading Anselm or developing his advocacy of punishment directly from Aquinas.

Wesley insisted that there should be a reluctance to use graphic language to explain the highly controversial subject of the suffering of Christ, yet he still insisted on the reality of God's punishment. He commented, "But what he most exceedingly feared was the weight of infinite justice: the being 'bruised' and 'put to grief' by the

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Thomas Aquinas Theological Texts*, selected and translated by Thomas Gilby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 333.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 320-344.

<sup>16</sup> Davies, 327.

hand of God himself.”<sup>17</sup> Since Christ knew this was the will of God, Wesley continued, “he drank it without any fear.”

God’s anger and wrath were real and this anger must be turned away in order for God to accept humanity. All of this was accomplished by Christ. Wesley accepted without hesitation that God was to be reconciled to humanity. This was an aspect of the pardon which humanity received by faith. He called this, “the highest degree of divine evidence that God is reconciled to me in the Son of his love.”<sup>18</sup> He repeated this idea in Hebrews 4:16 with the language of “our reconciled Father” which was due to the finished work of Christ, the High Priest. It is Christ who turned away the wrath of the Father from condemning humanity. Though John Wesley interpreted Christ as bearing the punishment of God due to humanity’s sin, at the parousia Christ will not return to bear the sin of humanity but will come to “bestow everlasting salvation.”<sup>19</sup> The subject of God’s justice and wrath, and the punishment of Christ will receive fuller treatment in a subsequent discussion.<sup>20</sup>

For John Wesley the foundation of the atonement was based in Christ’s High Priestly sacrificial work. Later in the Epistle to the Hebrews Wesley clarified his position. The primary High Priestly act was sacrifice and death with the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood. It should be noted that the emphasis lay in the death of Christ, not in Christ’s earthly ministry. So the comment was made, “This blood of sprinkling was the foundation of our Lord’s mediatorial office. Here the gradation is at the highest point.”<sup>21</sup> In the same passage Wesley added that while Abel’s death cried out

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<sup>17</sup> *ENNT*: Hebrews 5:7.

<sup>18</sup> *ENNT*: Hebrews 6:11.

<sup>19</sup> *ENNT*: Hebrews 9:28.

<sup>20</sup> In this section see p. 185-199.

<sup>21</sup> *ENNT*: Hebrews 12:4.

for vengeance, Christ's death cried out for reconciliation.

Wesley drew heavily upon the OT imagery to explain Christ's work of atonement. The general function of the priest was to bring God to humanity and humanity back to God.<sup>22</sup> So Christ took upon himself the role of the Levitical priesthood: "Whatever is excellent in the Levitical priesthood is in Christ, and in a more eminent manner."<sup>23</sup> The key to this 'more eminent manner' was contained in the supposition that the Levitical priesthood was performed by sinful priests while Christ remained sinless.

In this Christ took on the double office of Moses, the messenger of God, "Who pleads the cause of God with us," and Aaron, the High Priest, "Who pleads our cause with God."<sup>24</sup> Both Mosaic and Aaronic work were integral to the role of the mediator. The Levitical priesthood would now give way to "a better priesthood and more excellent dispensation."<sup>25</sup>

In comparing Christ's work of atonement with the OT concept of High Priest, Wesley repeated the significance of the Jewish High Priest who yearly passed through the veil into the holy of holies with the blood of the sacrifices, so Christ went through the heavens into the "immediate presence of God."<sup>26</sup> Because Christ was sinless he keeps us steadfast in all our temptations, yet *sympathises* with "our innocent *infirmities*, wants, weaknesses, miseries, dangers."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 5:1.

<sup>23</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 5:4.

<sup>24</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 3:1.

<sup>25</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 7:11.

<sup>26</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 4:14.

<sup>27</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 4:15.



Wesley commented in Hebrews 8:1-6 that Christ's priesthood excelled the priesthood of the OT in the same manner that the Gospel excels the Law. He then described the new covenant in six particulars:

1. "Being ratified by the death of Christ;"
2. "Freed from those burdensome rites and ceremonies;"
3. "Containing a more full and clear account of spiritual religion;"
4. "Attended with larger influence of the Spirit;"
5. "Extended to all men, And;"
6. "Never to be abolished."<sup>28</sup>

Thus, with Christ's priesthood the Mosaic Law was revealed as incapable of justifying or sanctifying humanity. With Christ "we draw nigh to God - Yea, so nigh as to be one spirit with him. And this is true perfection."<sup>29</sup>

John Wesley frequently mentioned the suffering of Christ, by this he was referring to Christ's death and not primarily to Christ's earthly ministry prior to the passion. At the same time there was the occasional reference which implied that he was not denying Christ's earthly ministry such as, "By his sufferings, in his life and death, he was made a perfect or complete sin-offering,"<sup>30</sup> yet he was more precise in clarifying that the blood of Christ was the "merit of all the sufferings," i.e., that which was acceptable to God.<sup>31</sup> From Hebrews 9:26 he again referred to the sufferings of Christ by commenting;

1. That by suffering he atoned for all the sins which had been committed from the foundation of the world;
2. That he could not have atoned for them without suffering.

This is further amplified in the next verse as Wesley insisted that there could be no further judgement on humanity after death since Christ's death was effective for all

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<sup>28</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 8:8.

<sup>29</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 7:19.

<sup>30</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 2:10.

<sup>31</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 9:14.

time. He believed the death of Christ became the mid-point in which Christ's sacrifice was effective going backward in time and effective in moving forward in time.<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that within Wesley's understanding of the priestly work of Christ, there is a constant need for his sacrificial mediatorial work. A person does not pass from the priestly work on to the prophetic work finally attaining the kingly work. The priestly work is perpetual by creating the effectiveness of Christ's prophetic and kingly offices.<sup>33</sup>

#### B. The Righteousness of Christ: His Passive and Active Righteousness

At this point the priestly work of Christ reaches a stage of controversy. The primary of objection to Wesley came from Reformed theology. Wesley emphasised a particular view of the passive righteousness of Christ that will not agree with the active righteousness of Christ, and by implication the recapitulation model of the Early Church Fathers. One of the continuing themes of John Wesley's theological formation was his concern to move entirely free of antinomianism. Wesley believed that the problem of Christians living in a deliberate lifestyle of continuing sin was countered by the understanding of Christ's passive imputed righteousness. Wesley was prepared to defend the imputation of Christ's passive righteousness but he was reluctant to do the same with Christ's active righteousness; he believed the imputation of Christ's active obedience was tantamount to opening a door to antinomianism. In this Wesley rejected what he considered as the possibility of someone claiming Christ's active

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<sup>32</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 9:26, "The sacrifice of Christ divides the whole age or duration of the world into two parts, and extends its virtue backward and forward, from this middle point wherein they meet to abolish both the guilt and power of sin."

<sup>33</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 7:24: "*He continueth for ever* – In his life and his priesthood. *That passeth not away* – To any successor."

righteousness as sufficient, instead of his own active righteousness.

This debate had already occurred in the previous century between John Owen and William Sherlock. Alan Clifford offered a recapitulation of this debate when he stated, "Owen had argued that the imputation of Christ's active, as well as his passive, obedience was the basis of the believer's justification before God. Sherlock argued that such a theory made personal obedience and holiness redundant."<sup>34</sup>

Christ's passive obedience meant that Christ willingly suffered and went to the cross. The crucifixion was not an accident of history, it was in God's plan. Based on John 10:18 Wesley put these words into the mouth of Jesus:

I have an original power and right of myself, both to lay it down as a ransom, and to take it again after full satisfaction is made for the sins of the whole world. *This commission I have received of my Father* - Which I readily execute.<sup>35</sup>

In the next paragraph on the same text Wesley further explained the relationship of the Father's will and Christ's original will: "He did it in obedience to the Father." As John Deschner interpreted this important aspect of Wesley's thought he stated that Wesley, "insists that Christ's power to lay down His life and take it up again was originally His: He did not receive it as a part of His mediatorial commission."<sup>36</sup> In other words, Christ's voluntary death did not spring out of his earthly ministry but was the prior intention for the Incarnation.

Christ's passive obedience was real and not subject to human experience, it therefore had a forensic meaning. Christ, according to Wesley, then imputed the

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<sup>34</sup> Alan Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790, An Evaluation*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>35</sup> ENNT: John 10:18.

<sup>36</sup> John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation*, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1960), 153.



consequences of his suffering and death to humanity and those that respond by faith are declared guiltless.

Christ's active obedience was a different matter. Though Christ was sinless and acted in conformity to the Father's will, the imputation of Christ's active righteousness had the dire consequences of creating indefensible excuses for deliberate sinning. Wesley preferred to connect Christ's active righteousness to Christ's prophetic office and this could only be done with the prior requirement of Christ's priestly work. Deschner put the case in this manner, "The active obedience, so far as it has a positive role, has the character of a teaching ministry, closely related to the prophetic office. It reinforces the law's authority in both sanctification and the last judgment."<sup>37</sup>

It can be seen that Wesley's preference was to assign Christ's active righteousness to the category of the impartation to humanity but this could only be done out of the prior imputation of Christ's passive righteousness. This is made clear in his *Remarks on Mr. Hill's Review*. In this apologetic text Wesley asserted that the only grounds for salvation is the death of Christ and not his earthly ministry. He commented, "Therefore, although I believe Christ fulfilled God's law, yet I do not affirm he did this to purchase redemption for us. This was done by his dying in our stead."<sup>38</sup>

Wesley believed that he detected the antinomian problem in writers such as Augustus Toplady. He attempted to paraphrase a pamphlet published by Toplady

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<sup>37</sup> Deschner, 154.

<sup>38</sup> *Some Remarks on Mr. Hill's Review of All the Doctrines Taught by Mr. John Wesley*, (Jackson, X, 386).

in which Wesley made the statement, "The sum of all is this: One in twenty, suppose, of mankind are elected; nineteen in twenty are reprobated. The elect shall be saved, do what they will: The reprobate shall be damned, do what they can."<sup>39</sup> The consequence of the eternal decrees of God, as developed in this style of Calvinism, created a door for antinomianism even if Wesley did not accuse Toplady of being antinomian.

The problem of antinomianism had begun with Wesley's early encounter in London with Moravian quietism. Later it became a major conflict with the Methodists who remained within the Calvinist theological mindset. By 1756 it was possible to see that Wesley had moved away from Christ's active righteousness or obedience as imputed to humanity. His correspondence with his former Oxford student, James Hervey brought this to the fore. Hervey had become a supporter of the Methodist revival but lived within the version of George Whitefield's Calvinism. Through a series of letters Wesley corresponded with Hervey over some of Hervey's theological treatises set in a dialogical format. Hervey had supported Christ's active righteousness as imputed to humanity. Wesley wrote a lengthy letter to Hervey and stated in part, "I have had abundant proof that the frequent use of this unnecessary phrase, instead of 'furthering men's progress in vital holiness, has made them satisfied without any holiness at all - yea, and encouraged them to work uncleanness with greediness.'<sup>40</sup> The intense discussion between Wesley and Hervey has been ably summarised by Allan Coppedge, Herbert McGonigle, and Albert Brown-Lawson<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *The Consequence Proved*, (Jackson, X, 370). Augustus Toplady never used the numbers created by Wesley and was offended by Wesley's method of attempting to attribute it to him. For reference to this intense controversy see Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 282-287.

<sup>40</sup> *To James Hervey*, Oct. 15, 1756 (Telford III, 372).

<sup>41</sup> Allan Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate*, (Wilmore, Kentucky: Wesley Heritage Press, 1987), 145-155; Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 217-239; A. Brown-Lawson, *John Wesley and the Anglican Evangelicals of the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Cooperation and*

and the outcome was the diminished effect of Wesley's revival in Scotland.<sup>42</sup>

The development of Wesley's position on the righteousness of Christ can be recapitulated in his sermon, *The Lord Our Righteousness*. There he stated:

In the meantime what we are afraid of is this: lest any should use the phrase, 'the righteousness of Christ', or, 'the righteousness of Christ is "imputed to me",' as a cover for his unrighteousness. We have known this done a thousand times. A man has been reproved, suppose, for drunkenness. 'Oh, said he, I pretend to no righteousness of *my own*: Christ is *my righteousness*...And thus though a man be as far from the practice as from the tempers of a Christian, though he neither has the mind which was in Christ, nor any respect walks as he walked, yet he has armour of proof against all conviction in what he calls the 'righteousness of Christ'.<sup>43</sup>

He had stated earlier in the sermon that he preferred to keep Christ's passive and active righteousness united: "But as the active and passive righteousness of Christ were never in fact separated from each other, so we never need separate them at all, either in speaking or even in thinking. And it is with regard to both these conjointly that Jesus is called, 'the Lord our righteousness.'<sup>44</sup> This argument is carried on throughout John Wesley's writings and is not incidental to his thought. In order to resolve the confusion over the separation of the passive and active righteousness of Christ, it has been shown that John Wesley turned to the theology of the Holy Spirit. Christian holiness was understood to include the vital role of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Interestingly, the imputed righteousness of Christ was acceptable to John Wesley as long as it was constructed to promote the doctrine of holiness.<sup>45</sup> Yet Wesley never attempted to develop the idea, probably because he believed it could not be done.

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*Separation with Special Reference to the Calvinist Controversies*, (Cambridge: The Pentland Press, 1994), 193-269.

<sup>42</sup> Allan Coppedge, 154-155.

<sup>43</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* II. 19 (BE) 1:462.

<sup>44</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* I. 4: 453.

<sup>45</sup> *Letter to Samuel Furley*, October 14, 1757 (Telford IV, 229-230)..



The point can be made that Wesley's concern over antinomianism led to an overemphasis on human obligation. Wesley's over reaction to the problem of claiming the righteousness of Christ as sufficient without the necessity of the human, personal response deflected the significance of Christ's finished work. He assumed that the imputed active righteousness of Christ could leave a person unmoved spiritually and instead claim that Christ had accomplished all that there was to accomplish and participation was not required. His method was to say in response to the question, "But do not you believe in inherent righteousness?", with, "Yes, in its proper place; not as the ground of our acceptance with God, but as the fruit of it; not in the place of imputed righteousness, but as a consequence of it."<sup>46</sup>

If a negative response could have happened, as Wesley claimed was possible, then the response is to be criticised rather than reject Christ's imputed active righteousness. A full response to Christ's finished work would lead to participation in the accomplishment of salvation attained by Christ. It is this point that Wesley did not emphasise.

A modern interpretation of this is helpful, although it is based on the imparted righteousness of Christ developed within the Eastern Fathers such as Irenaeus and the later orthodoxy of the Alexandrian tradition in theologians such as Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria. The imparted righteousness of Christ was also affirmed by John Calvin. Alan Torrance has said:

When people actually and joyfully believe, look to and repose on the fact that God in Christ freely completes on their behalf everything that could possibly be required of them and by the Spirit intercedes for them, they *will* not respond, in the face of and looking to the crucified Lord's word of grace to

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<sup>46</sup> *The Lord Our Righteousness* II.12: 458.

them, 'Good, now it doesn't matter what I do or how I believe!' Any such response could only derive from a loss of belief and a failure to repose on Christ's vicarious faithfulness - something that is more likely to be encouraged by focusing on the imperative of obligation or, worse, attempting to 'strengthen' them by making them conditions.<sup>47</sup>

Under this criticism it can be understood that Wesley, though he claimed to integrate Christ's passive and active righteousness, in fact, split them apart in terms of the vicarious atonement. The active righteousness of Christ, on our behalf, could be understood only as leading persons into the response of holy living.

Interestingly, Wesley wrote that he did not differ from Calvin "an hair's breadth" on justification.<sup>48</sup> Iain Murray pointed out problems regarding this, perhaps, too easily stated equation between Wesley and Calvin. Calvin did support the active righteousness of Christ for our salvation calling the whole of justification "double grace". He meant we are reconciled through Christ's blamelessness and then "sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life."<sup>49</sup> He then added, "Therefore, we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness."<sup>50</sup> Iain Murray commented that John Wesley missed this important point and said, "That Wesley could not see this, is a mystery."<sup>51</sup>

Finally, the culmination of Christ's priesthood is identified: "*Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost* - From all the guilt, power, root, consequence of sin."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation*, (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1996), 322.

<sup>48</sup> *To John Newton*, May 14, 1765 (Telford IV, 298).

<sup>49</sup> *Institutes* I, 725

<sup>50</sup> *Institutes* I, 727.

<sup>51</sup> Iain H. Murray, *Wesley and Men Who Followed*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2003), 227.

Wesley added, “he died once, he intercedes perpetually.” Christ’s priestly office is continuous since Christ is free from sin and death, natural or moral infirmities, and human weakness. At the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews the expression, “sat down”, denoted the completion of Christ’s sacrifice.<sup>53</sup> Wesley reiterated that the expression “sat down” summed up the whole meaning of the effect Christ brought to humanity. For Wesley, the Epistle to the Hebrews centred on the atonement.<sup>54</sup> The priestly sacrifice was the focus and ground for the atonement. Since Christ’s death was infinitely effective this naturally led to the explanation that Christ’s work would not end. Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father interceding for humanity. Christ’s ascension was crucial in clarifying this idea. Christ is now in heaven as mediator.<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere Wesley made a very brief comment on two aspects of Christ’s intercessory work in heaven. One is that we have access to the Father which means justification; the other is that we have access to all spiritual blessings which is conducive to the life of sanctification.<sup>56</sup>

Yet there is more than a Christological understanding to salvation; there is also the Pneumatological aspect. The beginning of the epistle placed the Holy Spirit in the role of sanctifier on earth. Wesley stated, “It is his atonement, and his Spirit carrying on ‘the work of faith with power’ in our hearts, that alone can sanctify us.”<sup>57</sup> The negative aspect of this is the purging of sin and the positive aspect is the life of faith of “perfect love and spotless holiness.”<sup>58</sup> In this Wesley insisted that there was

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<sup>52</sup> *ENNT*: Hebrews 7:25.

<sup>53</sup> *ENNT*: Hebrews 1:3.

<sup>54</sup> *ENNT*: Hebrews 1:3.

<sup>55</sup> *ENNT*: Hebrews 9:24.

<sup>56</sup> *ENNT*: I Cor. 8:6.

<sup>57</sup> *ENNT*: Hebrews 1:10.

<sup>58</sup> *ENNT*: Hebrews 9:14.



not only the objective work of Christ but also the inward renewal within humanity.

He stated, “We are sanctified - Cleansed from the guilt, and consecrated to God.”<sup>59</sup>

Wesley repeated this in saying that Christ’s death had done all that was necessary for a full reconciliation to God.<sup>60</sup> So the eventual outcome was: “First, a sinner is pardoned; then he knows God, as gracious and merciful - then God’s laws are written on his heart: he is God’s and God is his.”<sup>61</sup>

### C. John Wesley and Justification by Faith

It is generally accepted within Wesleyan studies that justification by faith became a cornerstone of Wesley’s practical theology after May 24, 1738. Wesley’s Aldersgate experience meant that he aligned his understanding of justification within 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation thought and from this he began his critique of William Law and Caroline theology. Although Wesley continued to maintain a deep appreciation of Caroline holiness thought he split from William Law over justification by faith. Highlights of this controversy will be explained in this section. But not only was there a sharp disagreement with Caroline theology, various critics within the Church of England did not support Wesley on justification by faith and this will also be outlined in the following material.

Various Reformed theologians of the 18<sup>th</sup> century also attacked Wesley on justification by faith but from a different perspective than the Caroline theology. Their objections centred on the controversial way that they believed Wesley described

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<sup>59</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 10:10.

<sup>60</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 10:14.

<sup>61</sup> ENNT: Hebrews 8:12.

the relation between justification by faith and good works without sufficient care.

Wesley responded to his critics but first a brief explanation of his initial understanding of justification by faith will be outlined, followed by the subsequent importance that Wesley attached to the Moravian influence creating a turn to the Lutheran understanding of justification by faith.

Through the Moravians Wesley became aware that justification was not to be equated with sanctification and the ongoing interaction between God and humanity. Justification was completely the act of Christ which would lead to an eventual human response and that human response was to be incorporated into the objective justification as repentance. From Acts 5:31 Wesley commented, "Hence some infer, that repentance and faith are as mere gifts as remission of sins. Not so, for man co-operates in the former, but not in the latter. God alone forgives sins."<sup>62</sup> It can be noted here that in the previous discussion on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit that there was a repentance prior to justification but this repentance was not related to justification.

### 1. The Early Understanding of Justification Prior to 1738

As a twenty-two year old Wesley's early definition of faith was marked by a rational approach to theology. In a letter to his mother he stated:

I call faith an assent upon rational grounds because I hold divine testimony to be the most reasonable of all evidence whatever. Faith must necessarily be resolved into reason. God is true, therefore what he says is true. He hath said this; therefore this is true. When anyone can bring me more reasonable propositions than these, I am ready to assent to them.<sup>63</sup>

He modified his stark rational definition of faith a few months later to include the

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<sup>62</sup> ENNT: Acts 5:31.

<sup>63</sup> *To Susanna Wesley*, July 29, 1725 (BE) 25:175-176.

more direct influence of revelation. He wrote, "I am therefore at length come over entirely to your opinion, that saving faith (including practice) is an assent to what God has revealed, because he has revealed it, and not because the truth of it may be evinced by reason."<sup>64</sup> Here is evidence of a movement from a rational approach to a new authority grounded in revelation. The early twentieth century interpreter of John Wesley's theology, George Croft Cell, described this as a move from *via rationis* to *via auctoritatis*.<sup>65</sup> Yet, it was still possible to see that faith had to do with mental assent, there is not yet an experiential dimension that Wesley would later defend.

At the same time his approach to theology was combined with the later Caroline theological equation that sanctification and justification were equivalent. From Lincoln College, Oxford, Wesley wrote a letter to his mother in which he applauded Jeremy Taylor's account of the pardon of sins. Wesley called it, "the clearest I ever met with."<sup>66</sup> Then he added in the letter to his mother a lengthy quote from Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Dying*, which included the statement, "Pardon of sins in the Gospel is [a] sanctification." This led John Wesley to equating justification with continual acts approved by God.

In this light it is possible to interpret Wesley's purpose in becoming a missionary and deciding to go to Georgia. His *Journal* entry is clear about his motivation but it must be interpreted in light of his theological belief about justification as a combination of God's initiative and human effort. Wesley commented:

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<sup>64</sup> *To Susanna Wesley*, Nov. 27, 1725 (BE) 25: 188.

<sup>65</sup> George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), 143.

<sup>66</sup> *To Mrs. Susanna Wesley*, Feb. 28, 1730 (BE) 25:245.



My chief motive, to which all the rest are subordinate, is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathens...From these, therefore, I hope to learn the purity of faith which was once delivered to the saints, the genuine sense and full extent of those laws which none can understand who mind earthly things. A right faith will, I trust, by the mercy of God, open the way for a right practice, especially when those temptations are removed which here so easily beset me.<sup>67</sup>

It is important to note that at this time in his life Wesley's theological orientation lacked the personal dimension that would later characterise his preaching.

Robert Tuttle summarised Wesley's theology on justification by stating,

...it should be reiterated that prior to Aldersgate the word faith is never used in a personal sense in any of his extant pre-1738 sermons. He never uses the phrase "justification by faith." He speaks of faith less than a dozen times total and only in terms of the faith of the church or the Christian faith. After Aldersgate, however, his sermons are literally permeated with this important doctrine and personal faith becomes the all in all.<sup>68</sup>

Prior to the pivotal experience at Aldersgate on May 24, 1738 Wesley had met the German Lutheran Moravians, known for their pietist theology, and as a consequence began his conversations with Peter Böhler regarding justification by faith. Wesley also entered into correspondence with William Law, his former spiritual mentor. Wesley charged William Law with the accusation that Law had not adequately explained justification by faith. Wesley wrote that William Law had never advised him in the direction of saving faith as the condition of justifying faith.<sup>69</sup> Law responded that Wesley should have read more carefully some of the suggested

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<sup>67</sup> *To the Revd. John Burton*, Oct. 10, 1735 (BE) 25:439. The letter also reveals an optimistic expectation of the willingness of the native people of America to receive the gospel because they have not been corrupted by European culture.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Tuttle, *John Wesley: His Life and Thought*, (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1979), 229, ft. nt. #44.

<sup>69</sup> *To the Revd. William Law*, May 14, 1738 (BE) 25: 541: "How will you answer it to our common Lord that you never gave me this advice?"

material he had recommended,<sup>70</sup> but Wesley replied that the readings had not been specific enough and Law had himself offered an inadequate explanation.<sup>71</sup>

Years later Wesley was not hesitant to give historical accounts of the alteration he went through in changing his view on justification by faith. In the 1745 document, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, he gave an account of his early theology that was operative after his 1725 ordination as deacon. He indicated that he had confused sanctification and justification, then he explained, “I was actually ignorant of the nature of saving faith, apprehending it to mean no more than a firm assent to all the propositions contained in the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>72</sup> Wesley recognised that a mark of his early ministry was a rationalistic tendency.

Near the end of his life Wesley again recorded with detail his early growing awareness of the importance of faith that eventually would be integrated with justification. In his, *Short History of People Called Methodists*, he provided an account of his understanding of faith which he had adhered to prior to the Aldersgate experience: “But as soon as I saw this clearly namely, on Monday, March 6, I declared it without delay. And God then began to work by my ministry as he never had before.”<sup>73</sup> Then Wesley added: “In all our steps we were greatly assisted by the advice and exhortations of Peter Böhler, an excellent young man, belonging to the society commonly called Moravians.” The point that the elder Wesley made was that he had been in a process of re-considering justifying faith as a result of the Moravian

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<sup>70</sup> *From the Revd. William Law* May 19, 1738: 543-545.

<sup>71</sup> *To the Revd. William Law* May 20, 1738: 546-548.

<sup>72</sup> *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* VI. 1, Part 1 (BE) 11:176-177.

<sup>73</sup> *Short History of People Called Methodists* (BE) 9: 430.

contacts.

a. Selected Sermons of John Wesley Prior to May 24, 1738

Wesley's view of salvation prior to May 24, 1738 centred upon an understanding of the process of human moral exactness in co-operation with God's grace with a dependency upon the Church and its means of grace.<sup>74</sup> This can be further verified by examining a selection of sermons Wesley composed prior to his Aldersgate experience. Over thirty years ago Richard Heitzenrater published an important work in reconstructing the historical order of sermons preached by John Wesley prior to 1738.<sup>75</sup> Heitzenrater's documentation corrected some of the previously arranged order of sermons assumed in Wesleyan studies. Albert Outler recognised Heitzenrater's monumental work and included in Vol. 4 of the Bicentennial edition of *Wesley's Works* a selected list of sermons from 1725 to 1741. From this list five sermons have been chosen for analysis which will indicate Wesley's theology of sanctification which preceded justification. The analysis will begin in 1725 and will follow in chronological sequence.

The first sermon is *Seek First the Kingdom*; <sup>76</sup> this was Wesley's second preached sermon. In this sermon righteousness is duty towards God, neighbour, and ourselves<sup>77</sup> which Wesley equated with the concept of virtue. Virtue was attainable within our understanding through reason and revelation. Wesley added a further explanation of righteousness, "although this may in one sense be said to be ours, as

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<sup>74</sup> See Albert Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1974), 35.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Heitzenrater, "John Wesley's Early Sermons," *PWHS* Vol. XXXVII, Part 4 (February 1970): 110-128.

<sup>76</sup> (BE) 4: 215-223; Heitzenrater, 115. Heitzenrater's title is *Seek Ye First*.

<sup>77</sup> *Seek First the Kingdom* proem 6 (BE) 4:219.



being in some measure owing to our own endeavours, working together with the Holy Spirit of God, yet it is justly described to him and termed his righteousness, since He is the confirmer and perfector, as well as the infuser of it.”

The 1730 sermon, *The Promise of Understanding*,<sup>78</sup> accepted God’s sovereignty over creation and recognised that his ways are not discernible to limited human minds. The sermon dealt with theodicy and in the second section Wesley stated, “Indeed, he hath not so bounded any of his rational creatures but that they may obtain an inconceivable degree of happiness; and more or less of it everyone doubtless will obtain in proportion to his industry.”<sup>79</sup> In the third section Wesley turned towards the development of humility which was the beginning of spiritual growth. Lack of knowledge of God’s will, or the inability of humanity to know God’s will, produced humility<sup>80</sup> and this created for Wesley the conclusion that, “His purpose was not that we should see and know, whether we would or not, that all his ways are wise and good and gracious; but that we should believe this, should give an assent to it, if we gave any which was in our power; such an assent as we are free to give or withhold as depended wholly on our choice.”<sup>81</sup>

Wesley’s first university sermon was preached in 1730 and provided an early account of Wesley’s developing *ordo salutis*.<sup>82</sup> John Wesley made it clear that the first step to recovery from the Fall was attaining humility.<sup>83</sup> Humility would teach us

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<sup>78</sup> (BE) 4: 279-289; Heitzenrater, 120. Heitzenrater’s title is *What I do, thou canst not know*.

<sup>79</sup> *The Promise of Understanding* II. 2: 286.

<sup>80</sup> *The Promise of Understanding* III. 1: 287

<sup>81</sup> *The Promise of Understanding* III. 2: 288

<sup>82</sup> *The Image of God* (BE) 4: 290-303; Heitzenrater, 120. Heitzenrater’s title is *In the Image of God Made He Man*.

<sup>83</sup> *The Image of God* III. 1: 299.

to reform our ways through love and the knowledge of sin.<sup>84</sup> The following year he preached a sermon known as the ordination sermon called *The Wisdom of Winning Souls*.<sup>85</sup> Holy living was to lead to the winning of souls. John Wesley did not ignore the importance of grace, for only by God's grace could a person attain a holy life. But the way of holiness began in virtue which was the enjoyment of life, apart from sin, in mercy and peace;<sup>86</sup> the process included the attainment of human understanding. John Wesley commented, "...he that would well enlighten the head must cleanse the heart. Otherwise the disorder of the will again disorders the understanding, and perverseness of affection will again cause an equal perverseness of judgment."<sup>87</sup> The sermon recognised the necessity of human effort apart from any reference to justification by faith.

The last sermon useful for this discussion was written in 1733.<sup>88</sup> The intent of the sermon was to emphasise the love of God as the primary focus of humanity. It is a love without any thought of a return, a 'disinterested love'. Christians were to press on to attain this love for it was "agreeable to the strictest reason."<sup>89</sup> Albert Outler noted in several footnotes in the sermon the direct and quoted influence of the Cambridge Platonist, John Norris. This particular corpus of sermons was not published for public reading during Wesley's itinerant ministry. He kept them for his own purposes, or they were retained by Charles Wesley. There was, though, one sermon written in late 1732 and preached at St. Mary's Church, Oxford early in 1733 which John

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<sup>84</sup> *The Image of God* III. 2: 300.

<sup>85</sup> (BE) 4: 305-318; Heitzenrater, 121. Heitzenrater's title is *He That Winneth Souls Is Wise*.

<sup>86</sup> *The Wisdom of Winning Souls* II: 311-312.

<sup>87</sup> *The Wisdom of Winning Souls* II: 313.

<sup>88</sup> *The Love of God* (BE) 4: 329-345; Heitzenrater, 124. Heitzenrater's title is *The Love of God and Neighbour*.

<sup>89</sup> *The Love of God* II. 5:337.

Wesley promoted as expressing his constant view of holiness. This was the sermon *Circumcision of the Heart*. The sermon will be included in the section dealing with the Prophetic ministry of Christ.

## 2. Wesley's Understanding of Justifying Faith Subsequent to May 24, 1738

Albert Outler indicated that John Wesley preached an oral sermon on justification by faith on May 28, 1738, four days after Aldersgate<sup>90</sup> and Wesley published a sermon on the same subject in 1746. Outler commented that prior to the Aldersgate experience Wesley had been so preoccupied with holy living that justification by faith, as defined after 1738, had been obscured. Outler considered this to be quite remarkable since the subject had been a point of contention in the Church of England since the later part of the sixteenth century.

Alister McGrath's outline of the doctrine of justification in the Church of England demonstrated that the early period tended to be Augustinian at the expense of Luther's theological work on justification. McGrath stated, "the early English Reformation as a whole appears to have been characterised by theologies of justification which demonstrated many points of contact with their continental counterparts, except in their understanding of the *nature* of justification."<sup>91</sup> He then stated, "In general, the English Reformers appear to have worked with a doctrine of justification in which man was understood to be *made* righteous *by fayth onely*, with good works being the natural consequence of justifying faith - a possible

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<sup>90</sup> *Justification by Faith* (BE) 1:181.

<sup>91</sup> Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification. From 1500 to the Present Day*, Vol. II, reprint, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 99.



interpretation of the Lutheran teaching, as stated in the important confessional documents of 1530, but not the most reliable such interpretation.”<sup>92</sup> McGrath pointed out that between 1590-1640 the theologians of this period returned to a more explicit Lutheran understanding of justification, represented by Richard Hooker. Richard Hooker’s contribution is assessed by McGrath in stating, “For Hooker, God bestows upon man justifying and sanctifying righteousness in his justification at one and the same time: the distinction between the two lies in the fact that the former is external to man, and imputed to him, while the latter is worked within him by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>93</sup>

But following 1640 the theology of justification in the Church of England returned to the Augustinian understanding.<sup>94</sup> McGrath’s study on justification verified William Cannon’s earlier work on John Wesley’s struggle in defining justification. Cannon summarised the theological environment in which John Wesley began his ministry by stating:

Thus the conception of justification which was predominant in the Church of England at the opening of the eighteenth century was in the final analysis an attempt to hold together in a single system God’s grace and man’s responsibility. In doing this it laid its chief emphasis on man and on the requirements he must meet in order to be justified. Though it categorically affirmed that as man in himself can fulfil the requirements of perfect obedience and attain the right of justification, that all must be accounted righteous through the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, it none the less set conditions on the appropriation by man of the gift of Christ’s merits, and it established faith, in the sense of belief, and works, in the sense of moral and sacramental acts of obedience, as absolutely essential instruments for the bestowal of justifying grace. Man must take the initiative. Man must ask in order to receive, seek in order to find, knock in order to have the door of salvation freely opened.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Alister McGrath, 101.

<sup>93</sup> Alister McGrath, 104.

<sup>94</sup> Alister McGrath, 108-109.

<sup>95</sup> William Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley: With Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1946), 43.

This helps explain Wesley's later criticism of many of the clergy in the Church of England. Though he located justification by faith in the *BCP*, Wesley was not hesitant to point out that justification by faith, as distinct from sanctification, was not recognised by many of the clerics. As late as 1789 he wrote about his concern for the lack of knowledge among the clergy concerning justifying faith. In a letter to William Green he distinguished between the personal morality of some of the ministers, which he considered to be corrupt, and the ministry which the clergy were called to perform. He then commented that many clergy preach, "Salvation by Works!", or as he also called it, "practical Pharisaism."<sup>96</sup> He meant that they confused justification and sanctification. At the same time it must be remembered that John Wesley was being criticised within the Church of England for his insistence on the Lutheran doctrine of faith alone. It was heard as faith solely. This was interpreted as leading to antinomianism the very position that Wesley would spend years objecting too in Moravian thinking and the predestinarian thought of 'hyper-Calvinism'. Stephen Gunter has pointed this out when he commented,

However, when Wesley was convinced that the Moravian error discouraged the active pursuit of holiness, he denounced them as antinomians. It does not seem to have occurred to Wesley that his rejection of quietism as antinomian was similar to the Anglican rejection of his *faith alone* preaching as antinomianism. Although Wesley does not say so, it is clear he recognized that it was counter-productive to preach *faith alone* in such a manner that it could be interpreted as *faith solely*.<sup>97</sup>

Wesley described the Aldersgate experience of May 24, 1738 in the language of a "heart strangely warmed" and a re-orientation of theological concepts began. He stated that he began an enquiry into the doctrine of justification according to the

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<sup>96</sup> *Letter to William Green*, Dec. 25, 1789 (Telford VIII, 178-179).

<sup>97</sup> Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of 'Love Divine': John Wesley's Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 270-271.

Church of England <sup>98</sup> and his investigation resulted in a document called, *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works*. Later he would write that it was by faith, or a God-directed mindset, that we, “receive him in all his offices as our Prophet, Priest, and King.”<sup>99</sup> This was the understanding of justifying faith and its effects.

In the ‘Preface’ to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739) John Wesley described the change that he and his brother had gone through. He mentioned that some of the hymns in the hymnbook had been based on the soteriology of “the Mystic divines”, then he added, “*But now we are convinced that we therein greatly erred: not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God.*”<sup>100</sup> The Wesley brothers now asserted that justification preceded sanctification, so John reiterated, “Holiness of heart, as well as holiness of life, is not the cause, but the effect of it.” This was set within a Christological framework with the righteousness and death of Christ as the basis of faith and justification. Late in his life, in 1787, he would reaffirm that the source of his belief in justification by faith was originally within the Lutheran mode.<sup>101</sup>

John Wesley’s document, *Principles of a Methodist*,<sup>102</sup> further bore witness to the Methodist leader’s requirement to explain his position on justification by faith. In 1742 Josiah Tucker, then Vicar of All Saints, Bristol and chaplain to the Bishop of Bristol, Joseph Butler, published a lengthy assessment of the Methodist movement. This was written according to the request of Hugh Boulter, Bishop of Armagh. To the

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<sup>98</sup> *Journal and Diaries II* (BE) 19: Nov. 12, 1738.

<sup>99</sup> *The Scripture Way of Salvation II. 2* (BE) 2:161.

<sup>100</sup> *PW I*: xx.

<sup>101</sup> *On God’s Vineyard I. 5* (BE) 3: 505: “Who has wrote more ably than Martin Luther on justification by faith alone?”

<sup>102</sup> *Principles of a Methodist* (BE) 9: 47-66.



charge that Wesley taught justification by faith, Wesley agreed.

He then proceeded to explain what he meant by justification by faith. There were three parts, according to Wesley, that are the basis for the doctrine. These were God's mercy and grace, Christ's satisfaction of God's justice by Christ's death and thus fulfilling God's law, and finally, our response by faith in the merits of Christ.<sup>103</sup> Importantly, a person is justified by faith because of Christ's atonement. He further explained that faith as a work does not satisfy justification: "although we have faith, hope, and love within us, and do never so many good works, yet we must renounce the merit of all, of faith, hope, love, and all other virtues and good works, which we either have done, shall do, or can do, as far to weak to deserve our justification."<sup>104</sup> The comment was added for further clarification, "But God himself justifies us, of his own mercy, through the merits of his Son only."<sup>105</sup> In the next sentence Wesley called this "faith without works." In 1757 he wrote in a positive manner that the, "divine evidence or conviction that Christ loved me and gave Himself for me is essential to if not the very essence of justifying faith."<sup>106</sup> This definition of justifying faith would occur again and again in his writings.

John Wesley was accustomed to strong critiques by a variety of people regarding various parts of his theological work. He wrote a response from Edinburgh in 1766 to the Reverend Dr. Erskine's attack that Wesley preached salvation by works. He first accused Dr. Erskine of not reading his material but basing the critical analysis on the published works of others. Wesley then defended himself with the

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<sup>103</sup> *Principles of a Methodist*, proem 1: 51.

<sup>104</sup> *Principles of a Methodist*, proem 6: 52.

<sup>105</sup> *Principles of a Methodist*, proem 7: 52.

<sup>106</sup> *To Samuel Walker*, Sept. 19, 1757 (Telford 3, 222).

remark: "I believe justification by faith alone, as much as I believe there is a God. I declared this in a sermon preached before the University of Oxford, eight-and-twenty years ago. I declared it to all the world eighteen years ago, in a sermon written expressly on the subject. I have never varied from it, no, not a hair's breadth."<sup>107</sup>

During the 1760's Wesley encountered the controversy on defining faith as a mental assent or as assurance. Since Wesley supported faith as assurance to avoid any hints of works righteousness he published his 1765 sermon, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*. In the sermon he defended the Christian way of life as grounded in God's grace and that faith brings about the experience of salvation. He insisted that, "faith is the condition, and the only condition of justification. It is the condition: none is justified but he that believes; without faith no man is justified. And it is the only condition: this alone is sufficient for justification."<sup>108</sup> It is important to note that faith is not only the condition of justification but is sufficient for salvation, nothing else is necessary.

Alan Clifford suggested that John Wesley's theology was still a theology in which humanity, in receiving salvation, allows God to save the person.<sup>109</sup> He sets this up in relation to John Owen's theology. Clifford outlined Owen's famous "triple choice" proposition and quoted Owen, "God imposed his wrath due unto, and Christ underwent the pains of hell for, either all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some of the sins of all men."<sup>110</sup> This, for Owen, settled the matter in favour of

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<sup>107</sup> *Some Remarks in "A Defence of the Preface to the Edinburgh Edition of Aspasio Vindicated,"* (Jackson X, 319).

<sup>108</sup> *The Scripture Way of Salvation* III.1 (BE) 2:162.

<sup>109</sup> Alan Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790, An Evaluation*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 99-101.

<sup>110</sup> Clifford, 111.

limited atonement. The third choice requires that humanity must procure some salvation and the first choice is ruled out because experience indicates that not all men are saved. Clifford criticised Owen for an overly commercial or calculated view of salvation and he proposed the Richard Baxter model that Christ's death was sufficient for all but effective for the elect.<sup>111</sup>

In criticising Wesley's position Clifford reasserted his view that the Anglican priest believed salvation was in the hands of humanity.<sup>112</sup> Since Wesley believed that grace was sovereign and sufficient for all, Clifford then asked, how can it be sovereign if not all are saved?<sup>113</sup> But Wesley's whole point was that in order to be sovereign grace does not need to be irresistible. Here it appears that Clifford has not understood Wesley's explanation of preventing grace. Preventing grace is the work of God in an unbeliever's life. Though it does not achieve saving grace, it is effective grace in a person which allows a person to respond. Without preventing grace a person could never respond to God's saving grace. The unbeliever then does not choose salvation unaided, it is already available to humanity and by God's work in a person that person can then respond. There is no self initiative in Wesley's system.

It is apparent that Wesley believed that faith made justification a reality in the believer's life. He continued to defend this position in the sermon specifically written to clarify what he believed. He stated, "Faith therefore is the *necessary* condition of justification, Yea and the only *necessary* condition thereof."<sup>114</sup> It must be repeated that faith was not humanly created, it was a gift of God. In order to establish the

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<sup>111</sup> Clifford, 112-113.

<sup>112</sup> Clifford, 117.

<sup>113</sup> Clifford, 118.

<sup>114</sup> *Justification by Faith* IV. 5 (BE) 1: 196.



foundation for justification Wesley, in the sermon, *Justification by Faith*, extracted from the *BCP* the 'Prayer of Consecration' at the Communion Service and the Catechism language of sacrifice, offering, and satisfaction related to Christ's atonement.<sup>115</sup> He then added that Christ's atonement was the basis for justification by faith.<sup>116</sup> Justification was the work of Christ that is done for us. It was completely objective. Wesley did concede that justification could be used in such a broad sense that sanctification could be included but this was not the general pattern.<sup>117</sup>

Justification, then, should be distinguished from sanctification. Sanctification referred to the internal change that occurred within a person and could only be accomplished by the prior act of justification. Yet both justification and sanctification were gifts of God. While justification was the work of Christ, sanctification was the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>118</sup> This explanation bore similarity with Richard Hooker's position in the mid-1660's. Lee W. Gibbs wrote, in explaining Richard Hooker's doctrine of justification, "...his view of justification has been said to be nearer to that of the Magisterial Reformation than to that of Rome."<sup>119</sup> After quoting from Hooker's *A Learned Discourse of Justification*, Gibbs concluded, "In this pivotal passage, Hooker argues that the gift or indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the *habitual* (not the actual) righteousness of sanctification which is ingrafted, and the external righteousness of justification of Jesus Christ which is imputed, are always united *in tempore*, that is, they are all received at *one and the same time*."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Justification by Faith* I. 7: 186.

<sup>116</sup> *Justification by Faith* I. 9: 187.

<sup>117</sup> *Justification by Faith* II. 1: 187.

<sup>118</sup> *Justification by Faith* II. 1: 187.

<sup>119</sup> Lee W. Gibbs, "Richard Hooker's *Via Media* Doctrine of Justification," *Harvard Theological Review* 74:2 (1981): 211.

<sup>120</sup> Gibbs, 219. See also Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification, From 1500 to the Present Day*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 104: "For Hooker, God bestows upon man justifying and sanctifying righteousness in his justification at one and the same time: the distinction between the two lies in the fact that the former is external to man,

After 1738 Wesley insisted that the very basis of his work was justification by faith and that it was a fully accomplished act of Christ. After 1738 he began to insist that there was not a twofold justification. If there was a second justification then the first could become lessened in its importance. He stated his belief in only one justification in this manner:

In flat opposition to this I cannot but maintain (at least till I have a clearer light) (1) that the justification which is spoken of by St. Paul to the Romans, and in our Articles, is not twofold. It is one and no more. It is the present remission of our sins or our first acceptance with God. (2) It is true that the merits of Christ are the 'sole cause' of this our justification. But it is not true that this is all which St. Paul and our Church mean by our being justified 'by faith only'; neither is it true that either Paul or the Church mean(s) by faith the merits of Christ. But (3) by our being justified by faith only both St. Paul and the Church mean that the *condition* of our justification is *faith alone*, and *not good works*; inasmuch as 'all works done before justification have in them the nature of sin.' Lastly, that faith which is the sole condition of justification is the faith which is *in us* by the grace of God.<sup>121</sup>

The second point in the quote is Wesley's rejection that the merit of Christ allowed us to continue in a life of sin. This meant that 'the present remission of sin' referred to sins that had been committed in the past. All present and future sin required a constant repentance, that is, a constant appeal to the atonement of Christ. Yet during his theological controversies in the 1770's he changed his mind to assert a twofold justification. Wesley responded to Rowland Hill's lengthy criticism that he continually contradicted himself. By now Wesley had changed his view on a twofold justification and he explained: "The justification spoken of by St. Paul to the Romans, and in our Articles, is one and no more." Then he added, "Most true. And yet our Lord speaks of another justification (Matt. xii. 37). Now, I think one and one makes

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and imputed to him, while the latter is worked within him by the Holy Spirit." It should also be noted that John Wesley was more specific. In 1765 he stated, "I think on Justification just as I have done any time these seven-and-twenty years, and just as Mr. Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him an hair's breadth," *Journal and Diaries IV*, May 14, 1765 (BE) 21: 509.

<sup>121</sup> Dec. 13, 1738, *Journal and Diaries II* (BE) 19:128.

two.”<sup>122</sup> This position is repeated on Mar. 14, 1773<sup>123</sup> when he is accused of holding to a twofold justification which was the same as the Pope. Wesley replied, “And so do all Protestants, if they believe the Bible.”<sup>124</sup>

The idea of two justifications appears to be a point of clarification for Wesley rather than a change in his thinking regarding the doctrine. The first justification dealt with the present life, of being declared righteous before God. Acceptance by God is the key to understanding forgiveness of sin and so acceptance is combined with pardon. The second justification is the final judgement and so it had the future in mind. This is the final acquittal from which there can be no further appeal, it is irreversible. It must be remembered that Wesley asserted that based on the first justification there should be evidence of this in the character of the Christian. In other words, a person who received the first justification should bear evidence of that justification. Yet the works which followed from the initial justification were not counted as merit for the final justification. Wesley clarified this in his comments from Rom. 6:23: “Evil works merit the reward they receive: good works do not. The former demand wages: the latter a free gift.”<sup>125</sup> Once again, works are only the evidence not the foundation. John Deschner created a summary of this position in John Wesley’s theology:

... evidence of the following summary statements can be made: (a) There is a twofold justification in Wesley. (b) Present justification is that referred to by Paul and the Anglican articles, final justification that referred to by Christ in Matthew 12:37. (c) Final justification tends to have the character of acquittal under judgment, an element lacking in present justification. (d) It is probable

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<sup>122</sup> *Some Remarks on Mr. Hill’s “Review of All the Doctrines Taught by Mr. John Wesley,”* Sept. 9, 1772 (Jackson X, 388-389).

<sup>123</sup> *Some Remarks on Mr. Hill’s “Farrago Double Distilled,”* Sept. 9, 1772, (Jackson X, 430-431).

<sup>124</sup> *Some Remarks on Mr. Hill’s “Farrago Double Distilled,”* Sept. 9, 1772, 444.

<sup>125</sup> ENNT: Rom. 6:23.



that the idea of a twofold justification grew more important to Wesley as he grew older. (e) Final justification remains, nevertheless, a justification by faith, although works are then adduced to prove the existence of living faith.<sup>126</sup>

Wesley was certain that justification was aligned with truth. Therefore, God was not deceived in declaring humanity righteous. He meant that justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. This is according to reason since it is Christ who satisfies the justice of God for humanity.<sup>127</sup> The idea can be stated in the comment, “God will not inflict on that sinner what he deserved to suffer, because the Son of His love hath suffered for him.”<sup>128</sup> Here we encounter Wesley’s Christological basis of the humanity of Christ which represents humanity before God. Christ as humanity removes the guilt of sin by satisfying the justice of God.

At this point it is important to identify the distinction between justification and sanctification within John Wesley’s theological thought. By distinguishing the two concepts clarity could be reached on the importance of both. The sermon, *The New Birth*, began with a statement on the clear distinction between justification and new birth, or sanctification:

If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be termed fundamental they are doubtless these two - the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does *for us*, in forgiving our sins; the latter to the great work which God does *in us*, renewing our fallen nature. In order of time neither of these is before the other. In the moment we are justified by the grace of God through the redemption that is in Jesus we are also ‘born of the Spirit’; but in order of thinking, as it is termed, justification precedes the new birth.<sup>129</sup>

Although this sermon was published in 1760, Albert Outler’s editorial comment indicates that oral sermons on the same subject date back to 1745. The same

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<sup>126</sup> Deschner, 178.

<sup>127</sup> *Justification by Faith* II. 4-5 (BE) 1:188-189.

<sup>128</sup> *Justification by Faith* II. 5: 189.

<sup>129</sup> *The New Birth* proem. 1 (BE) 1:187.

distinction was also asserted in *The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God*. In this sermon John Wesley stated:

But though it be allowed that justification and the new birth are in point of time inseparable from each other, yet are they easily distinguished as being not the same, but things of a different nature. Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change.<sup>130</sup>

He would also state along the same line that sanctification is the fruit of justification.

In *Justification by Faith* the comment was made: "This is sanctification; which is indeed in some degree the immediate *fruit* of justification, but nevertheless is a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature. The one implies what God *does for us* through His Son; the other what he works *in us* by His Spirit."<sup>131</sup>

In 1770 the struggle between the Arminian and Calvinist Methodists erupted causing almost irreparable damage. The main characters in the controversy were Selina, the Countess of Huntingdon, and John Wesley. The 1770 Conference had declared that works were a necessary part of the Christian life but were not the condition of justification but the Calvinists interpreted the text to sound as if works were necessary for justification.<sup>132</sup> The following year there was a relaxation in the controversy over the interpretation of the 1770 Conference Minutes and John Wesley wrote to the Countess of Huntingdon insisting that he had not wavered from justification by faith.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> *The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God* proem. 2 (BE) 1:431.

<sup>131</sup> *Justification by Faith* II. 1 (BE) 1:187.

<sup>132</sup> See Allan Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate*, (Wilmore, Kentucky: Wesley Heritage Press, 1987), 202-203 for the record of the Conference statement; also Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 265-277; A. Brown-Lawson, *John Wesley and the Evangelicals of the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Cooperation and Separation with Special Reference to the Calvinist Controversies*, Cambridge: The Pentland Press, 1994), 301-354.

<sup>133</sup> *To the Countess of Huntingdon*, Aug. 14, 1771, (Telford V, 274-275). For an account of the controversy up to 1771 see Coppedge, 191-220.

It is important to note that in John Wesley's theological system the accuser of the sin of humanity is God's law. Humanity transgressed God's law and is liable to punishment. It is justification, the work of Christ, that clears our name and turns God's punishment away.<sup>134</sup> Wesley stated:

Neither can it ever consist with his unerring wisdom to think that I am innocent, to judge that I am righteous or holy, because another is so. He can no more in this manner confound me with Christ than with David or Abraham.<sup>135</sup>

This was consistent with his statement against William Law whom he would directly attack later in 1756. John Wesley made the point that no one is justified by good intention on the basis that God had accepted Christ.

Since John Wesley defined justification by faith as pardon and the forgiveness of sin, it naturally meant that justification was freedom from condemnation.<sup>136</sup> Wesley asserted that there is nothing in God's acceptance of humanity that preceded justification.<sup>137</sup> He denied that sanctification was prior to justification. Prior to justification humanity is always condemned by God and this was made clear in the human conscience.<sup>138</sup> In a letter to John Newton which dealt primarily with election and predestination, Wesley reminded Newton that his position on justification had remained constant for the past twenty seven years and it was the same position as that held by John Calvin.<sup>139</sup> Since humanity is completely corrupt, humanity cannot do anything that is pleasing in God's sight.<sup>140</sup> Wesley put this in a syllogism of logic:

No works are good which are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done:

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<sup>134</sup> *Justification by Faith* II. 3: 188.

<sup>135</sup> *Justification by Faith* II. 4: 188.

<sup>136</sup> *Justification by Faith* II. 5: 189.

<sup>137</sup> *Justification by Faith* III. 1: 190.

<sup>138</sup> *Justification by Faith* III. 4: 192.

<sup>139</sup> *Letter to John Newton*, May 14, 1765, (Telford IV, 298).

<sup>140</sup> *Justification by Faith* III. 5: 392.



But as works done before justification are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done:

Therefore no works done before justification are good.<sup>141</sup>

With an extended explanation on the second premise he concluded that all works done before justification are necessarily sinful and therefore a person cannot earn justification. Wesley's position that there are no good works prior to justification is repeated in *Some Remarks on Mr. Hill's "Farrago Double-Minded."*<sup>142</sup>

Wesley proceeded to explain that there is a union of faith and justification. Faith is "a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for my sins, that he loved me, and gave himself for me."<sup>143</sup> This was based on Hebrews 11:1. Trust is a God-given conviction in which faith becomes operative in a person's life. It could never be a humanly created trust. Faith is the constant evidence given by God that Christ accomplished all that is necessary for our justification and acceptance with God. Therefore there is no righteousness prior to faith. Christ was the one who created justification for us by being our representative and, as Wesley stated, God "treated him as a sinner, punished him for our sins."<sup>144</sup>

Early in the Methodist revival John Wesley published a document in which he outlined the beliefs and practice of the Methodists. At the beginning of the document he explained justification by faith. This explanation is useful for it clarified his early and continued view of justification, but it also revealed the adjustment that Wesley would make later on. In the section on justification by faith he stated:

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<sup>141</sup> *Justification by Faith* III. 6: 396.

<sup>142</sup> *Some Remarks on Mr. Hill's "Farrago Double-Minded,"* 432; *The Principles of a Methodist* (BE) 9: 50-51; *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* I. 2, Part I (BE) 11:106.

<sup>143</sup> *Justification by Faith* IV. 2: 194.

<sup>144</sup> *Justification by Faith* IV. 5: 196.

To express my meaning a little more at large. I believe three things must go together in our justification: upon God's part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ's part, the satisfaction of God's justice by the offering his body and shedding his blood, 'and fulfilling the law of God perfectly'; and upon our part, true and living faith in the merits of Jesus Christ. So that in our justification there is not only God's mercy and grace, but his justice also.<sup>145</sup>

Later in the document he added:

Neither does faith shut out good works, necessarily to be done afterwards. But 'we may not do them to this intent, to be justified by doing them.' Our justification comes freely, of the mercy of God. For whereas all the world was not able to pay any part towards their ransom it pleased him, without any of our deserving, to prepare for us Christ's body and blood, whereby our ransom might be paid, 'his law fulfilled, and his justice satisfied.' Christ therefore is now the righteousness of all them that truly believe in him. 'He for them paid the ransom by his death. He for them fulfilled the law in his life.' So that now in him, and by him, every believer may be called a fulfiller of the law.<sup>146</sup>

Here is an important adjustment. In the 1772 edition of Wesley's *Works* the last two lines were omitted for the lines support Christ's active righteousness imputed to humanity which Wesley would reject as supporting a defence of antinomianism.<sup>147</sup>

Finally, for our purposes, Wesley commented, "In strictness, therefore, neither our faith nor our works justify us, i.e., deserve the remission of our sins. But God himself justifies us, of his own mercy, through the merits of his Son only." Wesley continued to maintain the tension between God's justice, mercy, and grace. Within God his mercy and grace resolve his justice. The *Homilies* of the Church of England are revised by Wesley by his omitting any reference to the active righteousness of Christ imputed to humanity so, according to Wesley, there is nothing on our part that can further our acceptance or justification by God.

William Cannon's mid-twentieth century study on John Wesley asserted that,

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<sup>145</sup> *The Principles of a Methodist* 3 (BE) 9: 51.

<sup>146</sup> *The Principles of a Methodist* 5: 51.

<sup>147</sup> Albert Outler has noted this in his footnote in *The Principles of a Methodist* (BE) 9: 51.

“Wesley’s doctrine of justification was the measure and determinant of all else.”<sup>148</sup>

This has been supported by more recent studies. For instance, Thomas Langford placed John Wesley within the Reformation tradition. He stated, “Justification by grace through faith is central in John Wesley’s thought...And this places him clearly in the mainstream of the Reformation tradition.”<sup>149</sup> Kenneth Collins summarised Wesley’s understanding of justifying faith in this manner: “...justifying faith embraces several vital factors. On a notional level, it entails Christ reconciling the world to himself; on a personal level, it includes a hearty trust (*fiducia*) in the person and work of Christ; and on a sensate or experiential level, it embraces a trust that is nothing less than a supernatural work, a ‘divine evidence and conviction’ that Christ ‘loved me and gave himself for me.’”<sup>150</sup>

John Wesley was an experientially driven theologian. His theological orientation after 1738 was the communication of the Gospel in order to assist people into an experience of salvation. But first it was to be understood that the Gospel was the revelation of God, God had taken the initiative and continued to be the initiative. Wesley never lost the desire to investigate the understanding of the meaning of the Gospel. His readings throughout his life were extensive covering topics not only in theology but also subjects from philosophy to natural science, and he was not hesitant to publish extracts, assessments, or original studies on a wide variety of topics. In the latter part of his life, in 1781, he recorded that he had read John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.<sup>151</sup> This was important since Wesley was already

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<sup>148</sup> Cannon, 14.

<sup>149</sup> Thomas Langford, “John Wesley’s Doctrine of Justification,” *The Bulletin: Committee on Archives and History of the United Church of Canada* 29 1983: 47.

<sup>150</sup> Kenneth Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 79.

<sup>151</sup> *Remarks Upon Mr. Locke’s “Essay On Human Understanding*, (Jackson XIII, 455, April 28, 1781).



convinced of the importance of experience. Experience bore great importance to his understanding of faith and justification. As Thomas Langford stated, “Epistemologically Wesley is a Lockean.”<sup>152</sup> This conclusion by Langford is incorrect, Wesley was not a Lockean. His early work on experiential theology was grounded in Peter Browne and Locke’s philosophical thought came much later. Wesley critically incorporated Locke into his system after it had already been established. Langford did add at the same reference:

He accepts the fact that innate ideas do not exist, all knowledge of the natural world comes from sense impressions and reflections upon these impressions. Faith is knowledge of spiritual, transempirical reality. It is interesting, therefore, that in the first *Appeal* he describes faith as the eye, the ear, the palate, and the feeling of the soul and thereby he transposes Lockean empirical philosophy to spiritual discernment. Faith is the knowledge of God as God is directly impressed upon our sensibility by God’s own activity.

Once God is perceived by his direct action upon humanity, humanity responds through that faith. As Langford wrote, “In Lockean terms, faith includes human reflection upon the given impressions of God. To say that faith is a condition of the relationship of persons with God is not the same as to say that faith, of itself, produces the relationship. Faith is the evoked human ‘Amen’ to God’s work.”<sup>153</sup>

Faith becomes the response, or witness, to the initiation of God’s act. God produces the faith, the response is human. God’s initiative work is called ‘grace’ and it is interlocked with faith. Wesley was intent on maintaining the meaning of true humanity by not allowing it to be swallowed up in God. This was a point of controversy with his interpreters. When he spoke of co-operation in salvation he was accused of Pelagianism. Wesley, though, intended to keep humanity true to humanity.

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<sup>152</sup> Langford, 50.

<sup>153</sup> Langford, 51.

Langford summarised this idea by stating, "The priorities are clear: God is first in action and supreme in virtue; but there is a responding human action and acknowledgement of value. Indeed, the mode of God's action in Jesus Christ comes from an invitation to such a response."<sup>154</sup>

Wesley extracted portions of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* which were published in the *Arminian Magazine* (1782-83). With his extracts he added personal comments, some critical of Locke's philosophy, but largely he was appreciative. Wesley was impressed that Locke emphasised the limitations of human knowledge. He stated, in reference to Locke's position, that humanity does not have innate principles of knowledge; "That all our ideas come from either Sensation or Reflection, is fully proved in the second book."<sup>155</sup>

Harald Lindström summarised Wesley's position on justification by faith in three sequential ideas; "*From God*, His mercy and grace; *from Christ*, His satisfaction of God's justice by the ransom of His blood and His perfect fulfilment of the law; and *from man*: a true and living faith in the merits of Christ, a faith which is yet not his own work but God's working in him."<sup>156</sup>

#### D. The Justice and Wrath of God

The concept of the wrath of God has been supported throughout the history of theological development and formulation. The wrath of God was understood in the idea of propitiation and the sacrificial language of appeasement in turning the wrath of

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<sup>154</sup> Langford, 51.

<sup>155</sup> "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. 5 (1782), 30.

<sup>156</sup> Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation*, reprint, (London: Epworth Press; 1946; Wilmore, Kentucky: Francis Asbury Press, 1980), 64.

God away from those considered to be the enemies of God. It was not until the seventeenth century, in the west, that such thoughts of God were considered primitive and should no longer be accepted. The effects of the seventeenth century Enlightenment were obvious to John Wesley but he rejected its philosophical assumptions on the basis of the revelation of God. In order to describe John Wesley's understanding of the justice and wrath of God, first, an investigation will be made into John Calvin's position, a position from which Wesley appears to have received great influence. The description of Wesley's own position will then be identified along with the varying influences in the eighteenth century English thought. Evangelical theology in the 18<sup>th</sup> century did not consider the wrath of God to be objectionable, although Wesley questioned the Caroline theology of William Law on his lack of support for the doctrine which was, according to Wesley, an essential part of the priestly work of Christ.

### 1. John Calvin, Justice, and the Wrath of God

In the following section John Wesley's explication of the wrath of God will begin with a response to William Law and this will be combined with a brief comparison with Jonathan Edwards and Isaac Watts. Theologians who worked with the acceptance of the wrath of God tended, at this time in England and elsewhere, to be adherents of the Reformed theology of John Calvin. John Calvin's thought was the prime example of a thoroughness that dominated English theological life. A concise investigation into Calvin's understanding of the wrath of God will further demonstrate the effort to maintain the wrath of God as part of a biblical foundation. With an



analysis of John Calvin's work on the wrath of God it will be possible to place John Wesley within this tradition, although each of the theologians mentioned stated the case in a manner particular to his own concerns and theology.

John Calvin, without hesitation, asserted that humanity could not find salvation through interior introspection; instead, humanity would find only the wrath of God:

For seeing no man can descend into himself, and seriously consider what he is, without feeling that God is angry and at enmity with him, and therefore anxiously longing for the means of regaining his favour (this cannot be without satisfaction), the certainty here required is of no ordinary description, - sinners, until freed from guilt, being always liable to the wrath and curse of God, who, as he is a just judge, cannot permit his law to be violated with impunity, but is armed with vengeance.<sup>157</sup>

Calvin proceeded to indicate that since God operates out of love, there appeared to be a contradiction between God's wrath and God's love.<sup>158</sup> Calvin explained the appearance of contradiction by way of 'accommodation'. God speaks in order for us to understand our state of salvific incompetence. Thus through accommodation, i.e., speaking for the understanding of humanity, Calvin summarised his position regarding God's anger, Christ's relation to it, and humanity's plight:

...that then Christ interposed, took the punishment upon himself, and bore what by the just judgement of God was impending over sinners; with his own blood expiated the sins which rendered them hateful to God, by this expiation satisfied and duly propitiated God the Father, by this intercession appeased his anger, on this basis found peace between God and man...<sup>159</sup>

Calvin proposed that in the contemplation of God's righteous anger humanity would turn to Christ for salvation. Although this is explained in an accommodating

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<sup>157</sup> *Institutes* II. xvi. 1.

<sup>158</sup> *Institutes* II. xvi. 2: "...there thus arises some appearance of contradiction."

<sup>159</sup> *Institutes* II. xvi. 2.

manner it is nonetheless true. The solution to the appearance of contradiction is in the renewal of our minds as we gradually see more clearly God's wrath and anger. Calvin then indicated with assurance that Christ did not come in order that God would love us, but he came because God already loved us and sent his Son to reveal such love.<sup>160</sup>

Within this theological proposal Calvin believed that there were two sides to punishment. One is the human side in which Jesus is condemned by humanity represented by Pontius Pilate.<sup>161</sup> Christ submitted to a sinful system which brought punishment upon him. Yet while Christ was innocent he was condemned as a sinner. Christ received 'just vengeance' because he transferred our sin to himself. The second type of punishment was identified by which Christ is the sacrifice to appease an angry God. As Calvin stated, "This term, therefore, indicates that Christ, in his death, was offered to the Father as a propitiating victim, that, expiation being made by his sacrifice, we might cease to tremble at the divine wrath."<sup>162</sup>

In defence of the idea that Christ descended into hell, Calvin stated, "In order to interpose between us and God's anger, and satisfy his righteous judgement, it was necessary that he should feel the weight of divine vengeance."<sup>163</sup> So Christ descended into hell, "seeing he endured the death which is inflicted on the wicked by an angry God."<sup>164</sup> Added to this Calvin supported the idea that Christ endured the punishment of God from Acts 2:24, "but God raised him from the pains of death, because it was

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<sup>160</sup> *Institutes* II. xvi. 4.

<sup>161</sup> *Institutes* II. xvi. 5: "...one principle point in the narrative is his condemnation before Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea, to teach us, that the punishment to which we are liable was inflicted on that Just One."

<sup>162</sup> *Institutes* II. xvi. 6.

<sup>163</sup> *Institutes* II. xvi. 10.

<sup>164</sup> *Institutes* II. xvi. 10.

impossible for him to be held in its power.”<sup>165</sup> Calvin added further clarification on this apparent contradiction. It is not that God despised Christ or was angry with Christ, it was more appropriate to say that, “he bore the weight of divine anger, that smitten and afflicted, he experienced all the signs of an angry and avenging God.”<sup>166</sup>

Marijn de Kroon summarised Calvin’s theology on the wrath of God by commenting:

Thus God’s majesty comes at humans with its demands, indeed even threats, for the reader is struck by how often in this context there is mention of God’s wrath, of a terrifying majesty (*Horribilis maiesta*) before which culpable persons must tremble, the wrath of God which has to be appeased. However remarkable this sort of statement may sound, however strange this approach may seem at first sight, Calvin not only knows it but it occupies an important place in his thought.<sup>167</sup>

Robert Peterson concurred and added that John Calvin clearly taught penal substitution. But he stated that Calvin was not the first for it was part of Reformation theology. He commented, “Calvin is not the first person to formulate the legal/penal view of the atonement. In fact both Luther and Zwingli before him had taught it.”<sup>168</sup>

John Calvin also developed a version of ‘vindictive justice’ as he worked on the Ten Commandments in the *Institutes of Christian Religion*. This was evident as he worked on the Second Commandment. He found it necessary to explain the Old Testament statement regarding the sins of the father visited upon the succeeding generations. Here Calvin attempted to vindicate God’s justice. God never acts unjustly to “those who love him, and keep his Law.”<sup>169</sup> In other words, Calvin

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<sup>165</sup> *Institutes* II. xvi. 11.

<sup>166</sup> *Institutes* II. xvi. 11.

<sup>167</sup> Marijn de Kroon, *The Honour of God and Human Salvation*, trans., John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma, (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2001), 77.

<sup>168</sup> Robert Peterson, *Calvin and the Atonement*, reprint, (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publication, 1999), 88-89.

<sup>169</sup> *Institutes* II. viii. 17.



admitted there is injustice in visiting punishment on the innocent. Even if the punishment is only construed as temporal it does not resolve the problem. Calvin's resolution to the ethical dilemma of punishment visited upon succeeding generations was based on universal sinfulness.<sup>170</sup> Calvin proposed that God's justice is always assigned to the sins of the convicted which includes all humanity. This is an important aspect of representative humanity. The conclusion to his comments on the Second Commandment was expressed in this manner:

For as the temporal punishments inflicted on a few of the wicked are proofs of the divine wrath against sin, and of the future judgement that will ultimately overtake all sinners, though many escape with impunity even to the end of their lives, so, when the Lord gives an example of blessing a son for his father's sake, by visiting him in mercy and kindness, it is a proof of constant and unfailing favour to his worshippers. On the other hand, when, in any single instance he visits the iniquities of the father on the son, he gives intimation of the judgement which awaits all the reprobate for their own iniquities. The certainty of this is the principal thing here taught. Moreover, the Lord, as it were by the way, compounds the riches of his mercy by extending it to thousands, while he limits his vengeance to four generations.<sup>171</sup>

## 2. John Wesley, Justice, and the Wrath of God

In 1756 John Wesley wrote a detailed letter to his former mentor, William Law, in which he strongly objected to the directions of Law's theology. Wesley accused Law of denying key theological concepts, one of which was God's justice. Wesley clarified his position by stating, "...it is now one main hinge on which the controversy between Christianity and Deism turns."<sup>172</sup> Deism, according to Wesley, denied justification by faith and Wesley criticised William Law for not only denying justification by faith but for disavowing scripture's assertion of God's wrath and the

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<sup>170</sup> *Institutes* II. viii. 20.

<sup>171</sup> *Institutes* II. viii. 21.

<sup>172</sup> *An Extract of a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law* (Jackson IX), 480.

reality of eternal damnation. Justification by faith and God's wrath were, in Wesley's theological formulation, closely related. In reference to William Law and the Deists Wesley stated, "As nothing is more frequently or more expressly declared in scripture than God's anger at sin, and his punishing it both temporally and eternally, every assertion of this kind strikes directly at the credit of the whole revelation."<sup>173</sup> He then reminded Law that he could use words like, "*wrath* (or *anger*) and *justice* as nearly synonymous; seeing anger stands in the same relation to justice, as love does to mercy..."<sup>174</sup> To deny God's anger, then, was to deny God's justice.

That Wesley had a correct interpretation of William Law's understanding of salvation can be confirmed from Law's, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. Law promoted the exemplarist model of salvation. From Chapter X of his work, Law defined Christianity in these words:

For as sure as Jesus Christ was wisdom and holiness, as sure as He came to make us like Himself, and to be baptised into His Spirit, so sure is it, that none can be said to keep to their Christian profession, but they who, to the utmost of their power, live a wise and holy and heavenly life. This, and this alone, is Christianity.<sup>175</sup>

Later in Chapter XVII he repeated the same theme:

Every man therefore is only so far a Christian, as he partakes of this Spirit of Christ. It was this that made St. Paul so passionately express himself, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ:" but why does he glory? Is it because Christ has suffered in his stead, and had excused him from suffering? No, by no means. But it was because his Christian profession had called him to the honour of suffering with Christ, and of dying to the world under reproach and contempt, as He had done upon the Cross...This, you see, was the reason of his glory in the Cross of Christ, because it called him to a like state of death and crucifixion to the world.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> *An Extract of a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law*, 481.

<sup>174</sup> *An Extract of a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law*, 481.

<sup>175</sup> William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1906), 112.

<sup>176</sup> Law, 223-224.

This model is based on a human self-sufficiency to follow Christ because Christ's self-sacrifice made the human sacrificial lifestyle acceptable to God. It was for this reason that Law earlier commented, "The sum of this matter is this: From the above mentioned, and many other passages of Scripture, it seems plain, that our salvation depends upon the sincerity and perfection of our endeavours to obtain it."<sup>177</sup> He then added, "...fallen men can do their best, and this is the perfection that is required of us, it is only the perfection of our best endeavours, a careful labour to be as perfect as we can." In his next paragraph he repeated the idea, "His mercy is only offered to our frail and imperfect, but best endeavours, to practice all manner of righteousness."

Almost twenty years later Wesley wrote to Mary Bishop to confirm that his previous criticism of William Law had not changed. He instructed Mary Bishop to refer to his comments regarding the wrath of God written in 1756 and then he added, "But it is certain, had God never been angry, He could never have been reconciled. So that in affirming this, Mr. Law strikes at the very root of the Atonement, and finds a very short method of converting Deists."<sup>178</sup> He continued in personal language, "...I firmly believe He was angry with all mankind, and that He was reconciled to them by the death of His Son. And I know He was angry with me till I believed in the Son of His love, and yet this is no impeachment to His mercy, that He is just as well as merciful." John Wesley went on to acknowledge that there were objections to the idea of the wrath of God but since he believed it to be scriptural then it was not to be questioned.

In the *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* Wesley raised the question

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<sup>177</sup> Law, 23

<sup>178</sup> *Letter to Mary Bishop*, Feb. 7, 1778 (Telford 6), 298.



regarding the appropriateness of using language of wrath in relation to God. Was wrath more appropriately a human passion and not applicable to God? Wesley explained that love was also a human passion yet love was not inconsistent with God. Therefore, he argued that wrath was consistent with God but it was not to be interpreted within human terms. He believed that love and wrath in God were real but only in “an analogical sense.”<sup>179</sup> In other words, there was not an exact equivalency between human anger and the anger of God.

Wesley had offered to William Law an idea he would repeat many times in various ways: “God was infinitely just from all eternity: In consequence of which, his anger then began to show itself, when man had sinned.”<sup>180</sup> It was the sin of humanity that brought forth God’s anger, so God who was infinitely just only expresses anger in light of sin. Law had stated that humanity was called to be perfect as God was perfect and wrath would violate human holiness. But Wesley countered that in vengeance, or more appropriately, wrath, “...God has peculiarly forbidden our imitating him in this.”<sup>181</sup> This created a limited clarification on the analogy between God and humanity regarding anger; because God was angry with sin did not justify human anger.

Other sections of Wesley’s writings carried this same theme. In 1782 he published his sermon *Of Hell*.<sup>182</sup> In the editorial comment Albert Outler added that this sermon was not as severe as the American theologian and philosopher Jonathan Edwards’ sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, but it was more severe than

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<sup>179</sup> ENNT: Rom. 5:9.

<sup>180</sup> *An Extract from a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law*, 482.

<sup>181</sup> *An Extract from a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law*, 484.

<sup>182</sup> *Of Hell* (BE) 3:30-45.

Isaac Watts' writings on hell.<sup>183</sup>

Jonathan Edwards, Isaac Watts, and John Wesley based their sermons on hell in their common interpretation of God's sovereignty and justice. Hell and punishment for the three theologians was required as a necessary part of justice. Hell, then, was real eternal torment for the ungodly. Jonathan Edwards used dramatic, vivid, and realistic imagery to convey humanity's utter contemptible sinfulness which is an affront to God's justice. The 'Application' section of the sermon stated the case: "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in yours."<sup>184</sup> The sermon ends with a fervent call to repentance.

On the other hand, Watts was prepared to use some of the biblical imagery as metaphor rather than in a directly literal fashion. Yet the symbolic imagery conveyed the ultimate terror of hell. A limited example of this comes from Discourse XII with the use of metaphorical language: "This shall suffice to explain the first part of the metaphor in my text, that is, *The worm dieth not*."<sup>185</sup> In the case of fire in hell Watts did not discount a literal interpretation, he preferred it, but did not push for the necessity of a literal fire.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> In a brief article by D. Dunn Wilson, "The Importance of Hell for John Wesley," *PWHS* Vol. XXXIV. 1 (March 1963): 12-16, there is a response to the criticism levelled against Wesley that he overemphasised the concept of Hell. Wilson's response is based on the texts from Wesley on the subject, stating that the idea is not overemphasised.

<sup>184</sup> *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2, revised by Edward Hickman, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1834, 1976), 7-12.

<sup>185</sup> *The World to Come*, Discourse XII, Section I. VIII. II, The Works of Isaac Watts, Vol. 2, 276.

<sup>186</sup> Discourse XII, Section II, 277.

For Wesley, though hell and damnation are, “awful and solemn,”<sup>187</sup> they are not contrary to God’s wisdom and justice. God had given sufficient warnings yet humanity continued to be associates with “the devil and his angels.” According to Wesley’s account, hell is utter loneliness and pain of the soul. Wesley drew this out in literal fashion.<sup>188</sup> This meant that a person in hell is consciously aware of its total misery. As he said, “...their souls are wholly awakened to feel the wrath of an offended God,”<sup>189</sup> and the greater the sin of the wicked the more severe the experience of torment.<sup>190</sup> Continuing in a more literal use of imagery, Wesley supported the idea that hell is everlasting torment. Its gruesomeness, according to Wesley, was ably described in scripture without having to add imaginative additions to its torment.<sup>191</sup> As a result there is no salvation in hell: “And not by God, for he hath forgotten them, hath delivered them over to the tormentors.”<sup>192</sup>

Since for Wesley there was no second opportunity for salvation after death, decisions made in this life could not be reversed in death. This was true for all God’s creatures that had an inherent moral conscience. Fallen angels were no longer loved by God. If God loved them then he would love iniquity. Therefore, at death, or separation from God, all hope of restoration was gone.<sup>193</sup> What was true of the fallen angels was also true of humanity. There was no injustice in God allowing people to receive their final destruction since such people had refused to repent and this refusal was wilful. God’s justice was not inconsistent with such punishment according to

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<sup>187</sup> *Of Hell* proem 4: 33.

<sup>188</sup> *Of Hell* I. 1-3: 34-35; see also II. 4: 37, where ‘fire’ in hell is materialistic.

<sup>189</sup> *Of Hell* II. 2: 36.

<sup>190</sup> *Of Hell* II. 3: 37.

<sup>191</sup> *Of Hell* II. 7: 39; ; III. 2-3: 41-43.

<sup>192</sup> *Of Hell* III. 1: 40-41.

<sup>193</sup> *ENNT*: Jude 6, “But now he loves them no more; they are doomed to endless destruction.”



Wesley's development of God's judgement upon humanity.<sup>194</sup>

It is now possible to turn the Wesley's specific use of the language of propitiation. The word 'propitiation' meant, "to appease an offended God."<sup>195</sup> If God had not been offended by sin then no propitiation was necessary. Wesley concluded with the thought that without God's anger, "Christ died in vain." Here we see that his definition of justice necessarily required the wrath of God which Christ's death turned away from humanity. Wesley asserted that God's righteousness combined his mercy, or clemency, with his justice which is, "that vindictive justice whose essential character and principal office is, to punish sin."<sup>196</sup> God's righteousness is both mercy and justice. This idea is repeated in I John 2:2, "*And He is the propitiation for our sins* - The atoning sacrifice, by which the wrath of God is appeased." The frequent reference Wesley made to Christ appeasing the wrath of God was extended to include its benefit for the whole world.<sup>197</sup>

Wesley proposed that there were two types of punishment with regard to sin. First, sin has within it its own consequence of destruction and punishment. Then there is the punishment that comes directly from God. John Wesley would refer to this as 'vindictive justice'. He meant that it was "awful and terrible", and inevitable, but it was not inconsistent. While God's justice required punishment of sin, Wesley also asserted that God could withdraw his restraining force and allow sin to achieve its natural consequence which is destruction. This was God's vindictive justice.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> ENNT: Rom. 9:22.

<sup>195</sup> ENNT: Rom. 3:24.

<sup>196</sup> ENNT: Rom. 3:24.

<sup>197</sup> ENNT: II Cor. 5:21.

<sup>198</sup> ENNT: Rom. 1:24; also Rom. 3:25.

This led to another step in the system of explaining God's justice and wrath. God's justice required God to punish his Son since Christ bore the sin of the world. As John Wesley stated, "The attribute of justice must be preserved inviolate, and inviolate it is preserved, if there was a real infliction of punishment on our Saviour. On this plan all the attributes harmonise; every attribute is glorified, and not one superseded, no, nor so much as clouded."<sup>199</sup> Wesley emphasised this in Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross, "...thus he cried out, while he suffered from God himself what was unutterable."<sup>200</sup> In the same verse Wesley added that Jesus' actual experience of suffering and punishment was objectively real and severe, "...filling his soul with a terrible sense of the wrath due to the sins he was bearing."

From I Corinthians 16:22 Wesley connected the anathema to 'Maranatha'. Anathema referred to something devoted to destruction and when it was placed beside 'maranatha' the meaning indicated that Christ would come, "to execute vengeance upon him," that is, upon the unrepentant.<sup>201</sup> This was repeated in I Thess. 2:16.<sup>202</sup> This meant that the final judgement would not be mixed with mercy.<sup>203</sup> John Wesley could then pray that people would not test God to see if hell was literal and face the everlasting consequences of hell.<sup>204</sup> He interpreted Revelation 14 as indicating two general visitations in which a near sense of judgement will come upon humanity, yet this would not be the final judgement. One, he called a 'harvest' which is the salvation people will receive; the other is the 'vintage' which is penal punishment for

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<sup>199</sup> ENNT: Rom. 4:1.

<sup>200</sup> ENNT: Matt. 27:46.

<sup>201</sup> ENNT: I Cor. 16:22.

<sup>202</sup> ENNT: I Thess. 2:16.

<sup>203</sup> ENNT: Rev. 14:10.

<sup>204</sup> ENNT: Rev. 14:11, "God grant thou and I may never try the strict, literal eternity of this torment."

the unrepentant.<sup>205</sup> So real was the ultimate consequences of God's wrath that he would add in his letter to William Law, "No hell, no heaven, no revelation."<sup>206</sup>

The opening lines of the sermon *Justification by Faith* began with the assertion that the wrath of God is in us and therefore we cannot live in peace.<sup>207</sup> According to Wesley, then, not only did Christ's atoning death turn away the wrath of God from the repentant sinner, it also changed the person's response to God. He clarified this in his sermon, *The Way to the Kingdom* by stating, "And it banishes fear, all such fear as hath torment, the fear of the wrath of God, the fear of hell, the fear of the devil, and, in particular the fear of death."<sup>208</sup> Since the Son of God tasted death for all humanity and through that the required punishment because of human sin, the effect of sin and its ultimate consequence on humanity was cancelled. We are re-instated to the favour of God and given the earnest of life eternal.<sup>209</sup>

At this point a conclusion can be made that John Wesley worked within a strict western theological framework. His understanding of the Priestly work of Christ as fully representative of God and humanity was formulated through the Anselmic western tradition regarding the justice of God which included Christ as the final sacrifice. With the operative model of God's justice came the idea of satisfaction. God's justice must be satisfied in order for salvation to be effective. It has already been stated that there is no evidence that Wesley sought out this model directly from Anselm but he did understand it to be consistent with Reformation thinking. Harald Lindström summarised this idea in Wesley by stating, "The work of Christ, by which

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<sup>205</sup> ENNT: Rev. 14:14.

<sup>206</sup> *An Extract of a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law*, 508.

<sup>207</sup> *Justification by Faith* proem (BE) 1: 182.

<sup>208</sup> *The Way to the Kingdom* I. 10 (BE) 1: 223.

<sup>209</sup> *Justification by Faith* I. 8: 186.



God is atoned, is perceived as a satisfaction. By it God's justice is satisfied."<sup>210</sup>

It has been pointed out that theologians who defend the wrath of God believe that they are true to the text of scripture. This is applicable within the long tradition in western Christian theology. The tension lay in explaining how it is conceivable, yet the wrath of God was understood to be personal and realistic. The tradition also worked from a model of God's sovereignty and justice. Still, there was a recognisable tension between the God of love and the God of wrath, the difficulty lay in holding the two concepts together. From this perspective it was assumed that Christ's death on the cross turned away God's anger from humanity. John Calvin was determined, though, to insist that Christ did not motivate God to love, God loved prior to Christ's death. Finally, the assumption that these theologians accepted was the position that satisfaction of God's anger in Christ's death did not exclude God's punishment of sinners. Christ was punished because he assumed sinful humanity, and, justice, according to this model, required punishment. The two components of justice were satisfaction and punishment. Justice did not eliminate the punishment. The four theologians mentioned in this section, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Isaac Watts, and John Calvin were of one accord in this. The difference between these four was based on variations in expressing the same theme.

#### F. Conclusion

For John Wesley the sacrifice of Christ was his priestly role. Christ offered himself as the sinless sacrifice for the redemption of humanity. But the priestly work was

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<sup>210</sup> Lindström, 61.

continuous, that is, it was constantly effective in the life of the believer, received through justification by faith. This meant that Christ's work was objective and was aligned with God's justice and wrath against sin. But this was not the whole of salvation. There was also the effect this had on the human mind through the work of the Spirit. For Wesley renewal and restoration were included in salvation so it had a subjective application. It is to that subjective work of Christ that we can now turn. Christ's prophetic office described the application of the priestly office and into this Christological pattern of the priestly office is imbedded the Christological pattern of the prophetic office through the internal work of the Holy Spirit.

### III. Christ and the Office of Prophet

#### A. Introduction

The prophetic role of Christ dealt with the human response following justification by faith. This meant for John Wesley that justification by faith was the beginning of the Christian life and it was a life to be patterned after the “mind of Christ” (Phil 2:5). The objectivity of justification and the objective/subjectivity of the prophetic and kingly roles are explained in his comments from Matthew 1: 16:

We are by nature at a distance from God, alienated from him, and incapable of free access to him. Hence we want a Mediator, an Intercessor, in a word, a Christ in his priestly office. This regards our state with respect to God. And with respect to ourselves, we find a total darkness, blindness, ignorance of God, and the things of God. Now here we want Christ in his prophetic office, to enlighten our minds, and teach us the whole will of God. We find also within us a strange misrule of appetites and passions. For these we want Christ in his royal character, to reign in our hearts, and subdue all things to himself.<sup>1</sup>

This meant that Wesley needed to explain the prophetic role and it would be a lifelong struggle to create clarification since he constantly referred to the goal of the Christian life as ‘Christian perfection’. The subject permeates all his writings, from his early twenties as a student at Oxford University until his death in 1791.

The first two sections of Part III provide the foundation for understanding Wesley’s explanation of the Prophetic work of Christ. This material sets Wesley in relation to the Reformation. Once the foundation has been established further elaboration in the subsequent sections develop in greater detail some of the great controversies in his theology with respect to the doctrine of holiness.

Since the prophetic office of Christ dealt with the human response, one of the

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<sup>1</sup> ENNT: Matthew 1:16.



key terms Wesley used to designate the response was in the language of the heart. Wesley acknowledged that 'heart' language altered its meaning according to the context and so an analysis of this language is required. John Wesley frequently used the metaphor of the heart to convey the meaning of the reality of a person's life. Since the language of the heart created a variety of meanings, other terms were utilised and these words combined to establish a full explanation of the inner life. An example of this can be found in the comment on Luke 10: 27 concerning loving God with one's heart, soul, strength, and mind. Wesley commented:

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God* - That is, thou shalt unite all the faculties of thy soul to render him the most intelligent and sincere, the most affectionate and resolute, service. We may safely rest in this general sense of these important words, if we are not able to fix the particular meaning of every single word. If we desire to do this, perhaps *the heart*, which is a general expression may be explained by the three following. *With all thy soul*, with the warmest affection; *with all thy strength*, the most vigorous efforts of thy will; and *with all thy mind*, or understanding; in the most wise and reasonable manner thou canst, thy understanding guiding thy will and affections.<sup>2</sup>

Here we see that the explanation of the heart which carries the overall meaning of experience has a complex interrelation of soul, or affection; strength, or will; and, mind, or understanding. But these various terms did not have a fixed meaning. Wesley could also write that affections were synonymous to the will. Affections referred to the various ways that the will expresses itself. In reference to angels, he believed that they were given affections or will: "As spirits he has endued them with understanding, will or affections (which are indeed the same thing, as the affections are only the will exerting itself in various ways)..."<sup>3</sup> All of this was to be aligned with reason, but not unaided human reason. It was to be the reason of God mediated through scripture, doctrine, and the personal work of God in human experience. Wesley would also add

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<sup>2</sup> ENNT: Luke 10:27; this is also expressed in similar language in Eph. 4:23; Luke 24:45; Rev. 2:23.

<sup>3</sup> *Of Good Angels* I. 1 (BE) 3: 6.

the word 'temper' to the human experience to express a person's attitude, or the church's collective attitude in life.<sup>4</sup>

This inner experiential heart language had a negative side. It revealed the reality of sin. Romans 3:23 meant for Wesley, "*For all have sinned* - In Adam, in their own persons; by a sinful nature, sinful tempers, and sinful actions."<sup>5</sup> Gregory Clapper has summarised further the various nuanced meanings of the terms used by John Wesley in reference to the heart in Wesley's *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*.<sup>6</sup>

Because the heart was also a synonym for original sin it could not achieve righteousness or sanctification on its own. The heart has neither the capability nor the strength to gain or maintain its originally created intention. Wesley interpreted 2 Peter 3:18 within a Christological and Pneumatological theology that required the restoration of the soul or heart and mind. Wesley added:

It is easy to forsake the will of God, and follow our own; but this will bring leanness into the soul. It is easy to satisfy ourselves without being possessed of the holiness and happiness of the gospel. It is easy to call these frames and feelings, and then to oppose faith to one and Christ to the other. Frames (allowing the expression) are no other than heavenly tempters, "the mind that was in Christ." Feelings are the divine consolations of the Holy Ghost shed abroad in the heart of him that truly believes. And wherever faith is, and wherever Christ is, there are these blessed frames and feelings. If they are not in us, it is a sure sign that though the wilderness became a pool, the pool is become a wilderness again.<sup>7</sup>

The experiential language that revolved around the term 'heart' was prevalent

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<sup>4</sup> ENNT: Acts 2: 46; Rom. 5:7.

<sup>5</sup> ENNT: Rom. 3:23; Col. 2:13 is another text which makes clear that the inner life is itself a self-revelation of the fallen sinful nature.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Clapper, *John Wesley On Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology*, (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 46-64.

<sup>7</sup> ENNT: 2 Peter 3:18.

in the Wesleyan sermons. The 'Preface' to the published sermons explained the purpose of the collection of the documents:

And herein it is more especially my desire, first, to guard those who are just setting their faces toward heaven (and who, having little acquaintance with the things of God, are more liable to be turned out of the way) from formality, from mere outside religion, which has almost driven heart-religion out of the world; and secondly, to warn those who know the religion of the heart, the faith which worketh by love, lest at any time they make void the law through faith, and so fall back into the snare of the devil.<sup>8</sup>

We hear the explanation from Wesley that the sermons were intended for all Christians at whatever stage they were in their Christian journey. Importantly, there is also a definition of Christianity, termed the religion of the heart, which Wesley included in the sermons and was developed throughout the whole collection:

What faith is it then through which we are saved? It may be answered: first, in general, it is a faith in Christ - Christ, and God through Christ, are the proper object of it. Herein therefore it is sufficiently absolutely, distinguished from the faith either of ancient or modern heathens. And from the faith of a devil it is fully distinguished by this - it is not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart. For thus saith the Scriptures, 'With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.' And, 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe with thy *heart* that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.'<sup>9</sup>

Authentic Christianity, for Wesley, involved the inner life, or the heart. He could then make clear the direction this would take, or the goal that was to be attained in this life:

What is then the perfection of which man is capable while he dwells in a corruptible body? It is the complying with that kind command, 'My son, give me thy heart.' It is the 'loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind.' This is the sum of Christian perfection, it is comprised in that one word, love. The first branch of it is the love of God: and

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<sup>8</sup> 'Preface' to the *Sermons on Several Occasions* (BE) 1:106. It is important to note Albert Outler's editorial comment that the 'Preface' remained unchanged and unedited in every edition of the sermons from 1746 to 1787; (BE) 1:103. This signified that Wesley did not alter the intention of his preaching, that is, to reach the heart of his listeners.

<sup>9</sup> *Salvation by Faith* I. 4 (BE) 1: 120.



as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparably connected with the second, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' Thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. 'On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets:' these contain the whole of Christian perfection.<sup>10</sup>

In light of this it is possible, as Gregory Clapper has done, to overstate the place of experience in Wesley's theology. He commented, "the affections are central for Wesley."<sup>11</sup> This is not quite true nor precise. Human experience was one of the keys in explaining authentic Christianity but the centre was always God expressed in Christological language. To say it in this way ensures the proper theological formulation for this Anglican priest's particular understanding of theological truth.

Out of the language of the heart Wesley further elucidated his understanding of holiness. Three important statements were made by Wesley in the 1770's. They were all concerned with affirming the certainty of holiness. In 1773 in the sermon preached at the foundation of City Road Chapel, Wesley asserted that holiness was constantly to be at the forefront of practical living.<sup>12</sup> Later in the same year he wrote that Methodism was based on two principles: "(1) None go to heaven without holiness of heart and life; (2) whosoever follows after this (whatever his opinions be) is my

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<sup>10</sup> *On Perfection* I. 4 (BE) 3: 74.

<sup>11</sup> Clapper, 98. Gregory Clapper makes the same overstatement in his assessment of Jonathan Edwards' experiential theology. He stated, "Edwards's affectional 'sense of the heart' was at the center of his psychology, epistemology, ethics and, indeed, his whole theology," 137. Jonathan Edwards, contrary to Clapper's interpretation, puts the Trinity at the centre of experiential theology. In his *The Religious Affections*, Edwards commented, "But it is with relation to the Holy Ghost, or Spirit of God, that persons or things are termed spiritual in the New Testament. *Spirit*, as the word is used to signify the third person of the Trinity, is the substantive, of which is formed the adjective *spiritual*, in the Holy Scriptures. Thus Christians are called spiritual persons because they are born of the Spirit, and because of the indwelling and holy influences of the Spirit of God in them," (*Select Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. III, 126). These overstatements led Clapper to align both Wesley and Edwards with George Lindbeck's category, "understanding of religion is defined along cultural-linguistic lines," 157. This is definitely a simplification of theology for both Wesley and Edwards. They both were confirmed in the importance of the Christian doctrine of God as laying the foundation for experience. This is almost admitted near the end of Clapper's study when he states, "Many things also still need to be explored about Wesley's theology which did not receive scrutiny in this analysis of Wesley's thought, such as the precise nature of the 'object' of faith (in other words, Wesley's conception of God, the Trinity, Jesus)," 171.

<sup>12</sup> *On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel* II. 1 (BE) 3: 585.

‘brother and sister and mother.’ And we have not swerved an hair’s breadth from either one or the other of these to this day.”<sup>13</sup> The foundation had remained the same despite the critics. In 1774 he again affirmed this conviction that Methodism was “to spread holiness over the land.”<sup>14</sup>

In several places John Wesley described his own personal account of encountering the seriousness of Christian perfection which began in 1725.<sup>15</sup> Albert Outler described this as a pivotal motivation throughout Wesley’s life: “Wesley asserted that his doctrine of ‘Christian perfection’ had been the creative focus of his understanding of the Christian life from his first conversion to ‘serious’ religion in 1725 and that it had continued as such without substantial alteration.”<sup>16</sup> Throughout his life Wesley encountered severe opposition as he struggled to explain Christian perfection. In 1765 he wrote to John Newton and said, “But the main point between you and me is Perfection.”<sup>17</sup> Three years later his letter to his brother Charles revealed the controversy which was recognised by the brothers. The created tension apparently caused continual questions in their own minds. John asked Charles: “Shall we go on in asserting perfection against all the world? Or shall we quietly let it drop? We really must do one or the other; and, I apprehend, the sooner the better.”<sup>18</sup>

Albert Outler divided the influences on Wesley’s understanding of Christian

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<sup>13</sup> 28 Dec. 1773 (Telford VI, 61).

<sup>14</sup> 16 Sept. 1774 (Telford VI, 113). Late in Wesley’s life he would write, “This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up,” *Letter to Robert Carr Brackenbury*, September 15, 1790 (Telford VIII, 238).

<sup>15</sup> See for instance, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as Believed and Taught by the Rev. John Wesley, from the Year 1725, to the Year 1777*, (Jackson XI, 366).

<sup>16</sup> Albert Outler, *JWO*, 251; see also, Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: The Doctrine of Salvation*, reprint, (Wilmore, Kentucky: Francis Asbury Press, 1946, 1980), 126.

<sup>17</sup> *Letter to John Newton*, 14 May, 1765 (Telford IV, 298).

<sup>18</sup> *Letter to his Brother Charles*, June 14, 1768 (Telford V, 93).

perfection in a chronological sequence. First there was, “a mysticism of the will that issues in a strenuous program of self-denigration aimed at total resignation.”<sup>19</sup> This is represented in the writings of Thomas à Kempis and *The Spiritual Combat*. Subsequently, Wesley was attracted to the ‘quietist’ movement but eventually recognised the antinomian tendency of this holiness style. The quietists are represented by the Roman Catholic writers such as Bishop Molinos, Madame Guyon, and François de Sales. Outler claimed that this type of holiness, combined with à Kempis and others, contributed to “the pitch of futile striving which was such a vivid agony in his early years.”<sup>20</sup> Finally there is the mature development in Wesley’s thought represented in two sermons *Christian Perfection* (1741 with several editions) and *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (1765 with several editions), and two tracts, *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1759) and *Cautions and Directions Given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies* (1762).<sup>21</sup>

John Wesley’s doctrine of justification was concerned with the answer to guilt, sanctification was concerned with inward sin. It was inward sin that could be altered. This problem within humanity could find a cure; healing was from both guilt and inward sin. A section from John Wesley’s sermon *On the Fall of Man* can illustrate this:

Here is the remedy provided for all our guilt. He bore all our sin in his body on the tree. And “if anyone has sinned, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” And here is the remedy for all our diseases, all our corruption of our nature. For God hath also, through the intercession of His Son, given us His Holy Spirit, to renew us both “in knowledge”, in his natural image; - opening the eyes of our understanding, and enlightening us with all

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<sup>19</sup> Outler, *JWO*, 251.

<sup>20</sup> Outler, *JWO*, 252.

<sup>21</sup> Outler, *JWO*, 252.



such knowledge as a requisite to our pleasing God; - also in his moral image, namely “righteous and true holiness.”<sup>22</sup>

It is possible to recognise the prophetic work of Christ within the human life which produces work within us by the same faith received in justification.

Earlier it was stated that John Wesley defined the prophetic office of Christ as, “the Prophet of the Lord, ‘who of God is made unto us wisdom’, who by his word and his Spirit ‘is with us always’, ‘guiding us into all truth’.”<sup>23</sup> John Wesley connected the prophetic role with the complementary work defined in Christology and Pneumatology and this created in humanity an awareness of truth and wisdom coming from God.

It is important to consider how John Wesley fit his understanding of the prophetic model into Protestant theology. He explained that he was not trying to define Christian experience, or a Methodist, by any particular belief. He was not an isolationist but he wanted to develop the intent of scripture, tradition, common sense, and experience into the whole of the Christian life. Wesley was determined to describe the Christian life in experiential language which was God-centred, or perhaps more precisely, Christ-centred through the work of the Holy Spirit. And so he stated: “...a Methodist is one who has ‘the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him’; one who ‘loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength’. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul...”<sup>24</sup> He went on to explain that Christ is the source of the atonement and reconciliation.

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<sup>22</sup> *On the Fall of Man* II. 8 (BE) 2: 410.

<sup>23</sup> I. Introduction, C. John Wesley and the Three Offices of Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King, 39.

<sup>24</sup> *The Character of a Methodist* I. 5 (BE) 9:35.

Not only did John Wesley describe particular attitudes such as rejoicing and thanksgiving as integral to a Methodist, there were also particular practices such as prayer and love of neighbour that gave evidence that God had purified the heart. The overall intent, though, was to love God with a single eye.<sup>25</sup>

Importantly, for his view of the place of the Methodists within the system of Christian beliefs, he believed that Methodists should follow the “principles of Christianity.” This was summarised in the statement: “He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written Word.”<sup>26</sup> He then further elaborated that this was to be defined in Christological concepts.

Since the prophetic office was equated with the moral wisdom of God it is important to analyse Wesley’s use of the moral law which includes an understanding of the biblical relationship of the OT to the NT. Also, for comparative purpose it will be important to note the similarities and distinctions in the use of the Law, in relation to the Gospel, in Protestant theology. To accomplish this a brief overview of the positions of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley will be implemented.

#### 1. The Moral Law: A Comparison Between Luther, Calvin, and Wesley

Brief summaries will provide an introduction to the specifics within Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley on the topic of Law and Gospel. All three accepted justification by faith as the sole ground for salvation and this defined Protestant thought. John Wesley recognised his indebtedness to Martin Luther as it had been

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<sup>25</sup> *The Character of a Methodist* I. 8: 37; I. 9: 37; I. 10: 38; I. 11: 38

<sup>26</sup> *The Character of a Methodist* I. 17:41.

mediated through the Moravian Lutherans. John Calvin was also indebted to Martin Luther although in a different manner.<sup>27</sup> It will be noted that Calvin and Wesley were more closely linked in the understanding of the Law than with Luther but there were divergences between the two in the use of the Law subsequent to justification by faith. Each of the theologians will receive an introductory comment on the Law and Gospel that typified the approach each maintained and there are specific sources that can be utilised for each theologian. For Martin Luther it will be his *Lectures on Galatians* 3:19; for John Calvin it will be his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* II.VIII; and, for John Wesley it will be his introductory comments to the series of thirteen sermons on the Sermon on the Mount. These references serve as representations of the overall pattern each maintained.

Martin Luther believed that the medieval development of a theology of works had done great damage to the doctrine of salvation. As Gerhard Ebeling pointed out, Luther moved from an early distinction in his lectures on the Psalms between the letter and the Spirit to the distinction between the Law and the Gospel. Ebeling commented that, "he expressly made this distinction between the law and the gospel his standard terminology."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification, From 1550 to the Present*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 36-37: "Calvin himself, has no hesitation in acknowledging the strongly forensic character of this concept of justification, particularly in his polemic against Osiander. It will also be clear that the emphasis placed by Calvin upon the *acceptatio divina* parallels that of the *via moderna* and the *schola Augustiniana moderna*...suggesting an affinity with the voluntarism and extrinsicism of these late medieval movements. As there is no basis in man for his divine acceptance, his righteousness in justification is always *extra seipsum*; our righteousness is always *non in nobis sed in Christo*. Although Calvin may be regarded as following Melancthon in this respect, he nevertheless preserves an important aspect of Luther's understanding of justification which Melancthon abandoned - the personal union of Christ and the believer in justification."

<sup>28</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, (London: William Collins Sons Ltd., 1970), 110.



The distinction in Luther's thought between Law and Gospel cannot be superficially explained as opposing systems. Rather, the Law and Gospel each has a purpose, or role to play, but for Luther it was important that the Law and Gospel never veer into each other's territory. For Luther the Law functioned in three primary manners.<sup>29</sup> After the Fall the Law pointed out transgression and unrighteousness and was therefore effective in restraining a person from social disorder (its civic duty), and, revealed spiritual transgression (its religious duty).<sup>30</sup> At its best the Law can only become useful as a restraint in social order. But it is the same law in both secular and religious life although the law functions differently in each sphere. He could therefore conclude, "...so when the Law is being used correctly, it does nothing but reveal sin, work wrath, accuse, terrify, and reduce the minds of men to the point of despair. And this is as far as the Law goes."<sup>31</sup> But prior to the Fall the Law had a natural function in which it was voluntarily fulfilled.<sup>32</sup> The outcome was that in eternity the Law and Gospel are ultimately linked.<sup>33</sup>

It is appropriate within the Lutheran framework to think of the law as not giving life but bringing death. Yet within the context of the Gospel, to which the Law must be understood, a person is to die before being raised to new life. As Ebeling stated, "For God kills in order to bring life."<sup>34</sup> According to Luther, the Law then can function in a manner which impels a person to seek God's grace revealed in Jesus Christ. Since the Law was conceived in such a basically negative manner it would be

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<sup>29</sup> Here I shall use Bernhard Lohse's study, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historic and Systemic Development*, (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1999), 267-276.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians (1535)" in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 26, ed., Jaroslav Pelikan, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 314.

<sup>31</sup> Luther, 313.

<sup>32</sup> Lohse, 273-274.

<sup>33</sup> Lohse, 275.

<sup>34</sup> Ebeling, 138.

consistent to understand that the Law's function would come to an end. That is exactly how Luther described the Law, it only had a temporary role.<sup>35</sup>

While this position appears to present an uncomplicated distinction between Law and Gospel it must not be construed that Luther had only a negative attitude towards the Law. Philip Watson has pointed out that Luther insisted on two offices of Christ, one as Lawgiver, the other as Saviour. These two offices are to be differentiated but then Watson added, "Christians ought certainly to follow the example of Christ and do such good works as He teaches, but they must not imagine that they are thereby justified."<sup>36</sup> Watson insisted that, according to Luther's thought, the impenitent person stands before Christ with the impossible demands of the Law and in becoming aware of the impossibility of fulfilling the Law becomes humble, recognising that Christ is Saviour. Only in receiving Christ as Saviour can a person follow Christ as the Example. The most important office of Christ then is Saviour and it takes priority over Christ as Lawgiver.

Philip Watson noted that there is almost a contradictory manner expressed by Luther due to his attitude to the Law but this does not accurately interpret Luther's position. For Luther "doing the works of the Law" is to be distinguished from "fulfilling the Law."<sup>37</sup> Fulfilment of the Law is based on love, "free from every selfish consideration."<sup>38</sup> It is Christ who is the Example of this fulfilment of the Law. Christ does not lessen the demand of the Law, for the Law's sole purpose is to reveal sin; Christ, instead, cures the effect of sin which the Law is incapable of doing.

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<sup>35</sup> Luther, 316.

<sup>36</sup> Philip Watson, *Let God Be God!: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther*, (London: Epworth Press, 1947), 104.

<sup>37</sup> Watson, 106; WML VI 449; WA XI, 120.23f.

<sup>38</sup> Watson, 106.

For Luther it is the misapplication of the Law when it precedes the Gospel that it becomes a Tyrant and is devilish. Importantly Watson concluded that in Luther's theological ethics, "Antinomianism is therefore as great an evil as legalism."<sup>39</sup> Watson summarised his important interpretation of Luther with the comment:

The Law spiritually understood requires us to be actuated by perfect love, a love that excludes all legalistic considerations of merit and self-interest in our dealings with others. Now since the Law is an expression of the will of God, must not this mean that God Himself is moved by nothing else but just such love? Otherwise how could he will and command it? The Law therefore, implies the Gospel, in which God himself displays toward us precisely the love that He requires of us in His Law.<sup>40</sup>

In turning to John Calvin and his understanding of the moral Law there is a clear distinction from Martin Luther. An overview of Calvin's use of the Law can be summarised in his explanation of the Ten Commandments in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Within the explanation of the Ten Commandments there is, according to Calvin, an application for people in the Church era. Thus the Law continued its influence in a positive manner when interpreted properly.

The Law functions to first lead us in worship to God and only then to true piety. Due to our sinful nature the Law of God must awaken our minds to reveal our moral corruption and then the Law can lead to an understanding of God's purposes.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Watson, 154. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1999) is also helpful on this point. In Luther's debates with the antinomians the comment is made, "If only the Law were preached it would lead to despair, not to conversion. Only when faith is added is the 'good intention' able to emerge. Thus far the rule applies: Repentance includes both law and gospel," 182. Lohse added, "There is certainly a 'pedagogical use' construed as a positive use of the law or the commandments. Incidentally, we should note that it is precisely when he distinguished the various *usus legis* that Luther still intended to hold fast to the unity of the law as an expression of God's will," 184.

<sup>40</sup> Watson, 160; it should be noted that Watson believed that Wesley completely misunderstood Luther's position on the Law and Gospel. He commented, "Wesley, however, has not only failed to grasp Luther's meaning, but he has not given him credit for what he actually says," 180, ft. nt. 35.

<sup>41</sup> *Institutes* II. VIII. 1.



Our only hope, as the Law reveals, is to turn to the mercy of God and in this manner the Law teaches “perfect righteousness” by working on both our inward and outward righteousness.<sup>42</sup> Thus the Law is more than a restraining influence, it includes a positive function. As Calvin stated, “When the particular virtue opposed to a particular vice is spoken of, all that is usually meant is abstinence from that vice. We maintain that it goes further, and means opposite duties and positive acts.”<sup>43</sup>

Calvin did not divide the moral Law into a secular and religious function, for him it was all one indistinguishable whole and the wholeness was completed in Christ. It was the Christological focus that made the positive contribution to a complete life of sanctity as explained within the Law. He then could add, “It will not now be difficult to ascertain the general end contemplated by the whole Law - viz. the fulfilment of righteousness, that man may form his life on the model of divine purity.”<sup>44</sup> According to Ronald Wallace this use of the Law has great consequences in terms of God’s response to humanity. Wallace stated, “Moreover, when God’s people give themselves to keeping by faith the Law of God they are counted as just by God, not through any merit or dignity that they acquire but because God sees in their obedience to the Law a reflection of the image of His own righteousness and thus God ‘contents himself’ with it.”<sup>45</sup>

Calvin described the overall content of the Law in terms of ‘Two Tables’. The Two Tables contained the whole understanding of righteousness. First, and in prior

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<sup>42</sup> *Institutes* II. VIII. 5-6.

<sup>43</sup> *Institutes* II. VIII. 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Institutes* II. VIII.51.

<sup>45</sup> Ronald Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life*, reprint, (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 113.

position, is the worship of God.<sup>46</sup> Here is “the very soul by which the whole lives and breathes.” Secondly, and as a result of the first, is our conduct towards other people. This is contained not only in the Ten Commandments but is also a part of the Gospel. Calvin explained that Christ’s teaching, as demonstrated in the Gospels and applied to humanity, leads humanity into purity of life: “You see how, of the two parts under which he comprehends the whole Law, he devotes the one to God, and assigns the other to mankind.”<sup>47</sup>

The Ten Commandments can therefore be divided into two parts. The first four commandments, or the First Table, pertain to our relationship to God, and, the next six commandments, or Second Table, pertain to our relationship with fellow humans. Importantly, to fulfill the law within the life of believers means that people are to be “engrafted into Christ” with “the Law written in their hearts” by the Holy Spirit.<sup>48</sup> The moral law then becomes an expression of the promises of God, or his graciousness to humanity. As Calvin commented, “...the promise contained in the First Table (is) not being specifically appropriated to any one commandment, but (is) extended to the whole law.”<sup>49</sup> Calvin continued this theme in Book III, where he stated, “We can now understand what are the fruits of repentance - viz. the offices of piety towards God, and love towards man, general holiness and purity of life. In short, the more a man studies to conform his life to the standard of the divine law, the surer signs he gives of his repentance.”<sup>50</sup> Genuine and sincere repentance leads to purity of life which becomes conformity to God’s Law which becomes a reflection of

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<sup>46</sup> *Institutes* II. VIII. 11; also, VII.1. 51.

<sup>47</sup> *Institutes* II. VIII. 11.

<sup>48</sup> *Institutes* II. VIII. 57.

<sup>49</sup> *Institutes* II. VIII. 37.

<sup>50</sup> *Institutes* III. III. 16.

the will of God. In other words, inner change is reflected in outward behaviour. The positive summary of Calvin's understanding of the Law is offered by Ronald Wallace, "Everything we need for our sanctification, and indeed for the full perfection of our Christian life, is contained within the Law, if we will give it its true meaning and seek to fulfil it in the power of the Spirit."<sup>51</sup> To live with an appropriate understanding of the Law is to give evidence of the restored life.

Since for John Calvin the Christian life is a life of righteousness and holiness, Ronald Wallace concluded, "Therefore to live a life ordered according to the image of God is to live according to the law of God."<sup>52</sup> John Wesley would later centre his doctrine of Christian perfection on love to God which resulted in love to neighbour but Calvin had already insisted on this specific order. Wallace summarised Calvin's position by stating, "The service of God must therefore be the foundation of our whole life and the inspiration of our service to our neighbour, since man's chief end is to glorify His Maker."<sup>53</sup> Wallace took the opportunity in his important study to demonstrate that there were three directions created by the Law for humanity: full consecration, self-denial, and a way of life in the power of the Spirit.<sup>54</sup>

Now there can be added a few final comments on the three-fold use of the Law in John Calvin. The important contribution of Marijn de Kroon is helpful at this point. As de Kroon commented, "A discussion of the Law of the Old Covenant can be viewed as an introduction to Christ and is actually already a discussion of Christ, be it

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<sup>51</sup> Wallace, 121.

<sup>52</sup> Wallace, 112.

<sup>53</sup> Wallace, 115.

<sup>54</sup> Wallace, 116-122.



in the concealed manner which marks the old dispensation.”<sup>55</sup> A brief comment from Calvin’s *Institutes* sets down this Christological focus: “From the grace offered to the Jews, we may certainly infer, that the law was not a stranger to Christ.”<sup>56</sup> Calvin’s three-fold use of the Law is then explained by de Kroon. First, it reveals humanity’s unrighteousness;<sup>57</sup> secondly, it is a disciplinarian and restrains humanity;<sup>58</sup> thirdly, the regenerated person responds positively and willingly to the Law by the power of the Spirit of God.<sup>59</sup> From this third function comes the imperative to progress in life and live a holy life.<sup>60</sup>

From this summary of Martin Luther and John Calvin we can now turn to an introductory description of John Wesley’s understanding of the moral Law. A major source for comprehending Wesley’s position is in the series of thirteen published sermons from Matthew 5-7. The introduction to the first sermon provides a brief description of Wesley’s overall model. Each sermon can stand on its own as a complete statement, yet when the sermons are placed together they create a whole picture of Christian personal and social ethics. Wesley’s own description of each sermon as incorporating part of the whole was depicted as, “stones in an arch.”<sup>61</sup>

It will become clear that Wesley worked within an ethical system of the moral Law that bore similarity to John Calvin. John Wesley’s understanding of the relationship between the Law and Gospel can be summarised in his statement,

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<sup>55</sup> Marijn de Kroon, *The Honour of God and Human Salvation: Calvin’s Theology According to His Institutes*, trans., John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma, (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2001), 63.

<sup>56</sup> *Institutes*, II. 7.1.

<sup>57</sup> de Kroon, 65.

<sup>58</sup> de Kroon, 67.

<sup>59</sup> de Kroon, 67.

<sup>60</sup> de Kroon, 67-72.

<sup>61</sup> *Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* proem 6 (BE) 1: 473.

“...there is no contrariety at all between the law and the gospel...they agree perfectly well together.”<sup>62</sup> He illustrated it in this manner: “Thus, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,’ when considered as a commandment, is a branch of the law; when regarded as a promise, is an essential part of the gospel - the gospel being no other than the commands of the law proposed by way of promises.”

Harald Lindström summarised in three parts the purpose of the Law according to John Wesley’s system:

- 1) “The first use is to instil conviction of sin. It unmask man and reveals to him his real nature; that he is dead to God and devoid of all spiritual life;”
- 2) “The second is to lead men to Christ that he may live. Although in these functions the law acts as a ‘severe schoolmaster,’ love is operative behind it and uses the law for its own ends.”
- 3) “The third use of the law concerns its place in the Christian life. The law does not only lead men to Christ, it also serves to keep the justified and regenerated man alive and helps him to grow.”<sup>63</sup>

Once the Methodist revival had begun the theology of sanctification was the driving force in Wesley’s life. Holy living had moved from a personal quest to a universal call to all believers. This required a clear statement on sanctification and the basic foundation was based on the view that all Christians were holy people.<sup>64</sup> The term, entire sanctification, one of many terms used, referred to mature Christians. In principle Wesley kept to the distinction between sanctification and entire sanctification but there were times such clarity was not adhered too.

The comparative examination of the use of the Law has been made by using

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<sup>62</sup> *Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fifth* II. 2 (BE) 1:554.

<sup>63</sup> Lindström, 81.

<sup>64</sup> *The Fourth Annual Conference, 1747*: “the term ‘sanctified’ is continually applied by St. Paul to all that were justified - were true believers,” *JWO*, 167.

references to the Reformation theology of Luther and Calvin. By doing this a conclusion can be reached that Wesley operated within the Reformation theology, more closely linked to Calvin than Luther, and now the more specific analysis of John Wesley's use of the Law can be made.

## B. The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount did not nullify the Old Testament Law but fulfilled its intention. Like Calvin's Christological approach, Wesley began on the foundation of the identity of Christ who is the creator of Christian ethics. Six identifiable points can be made regarding Christ:

- 1) He is the eternal creator and the sovereign Governor;
- 2) He is the "great Lawgiver" who has the authority and ability to enforce all his laws; to save and destroy;
- 3) He is the "eternal Wisdom of the Father" who is omniscient and knows "how to adapt every law he prescribes to all the circumstances wherein he hath placed us;"
- 4) He is the "God of love" who has come from the Father "to declare his will to the children of men;"
- 5) He will ascend to heaven in order to complete his purpose in bringing salvation;
- 6) He is the "great Prophet of the Lord" whose teaching is to be listened to and acted upon as evidence of God's salvation at work in a person's life.<sup>65</sup>

Then Wesley stated the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount in three particulars:

- 1) "to show the way to heaven;" "the royal way which leads to the kingdom;"
- 2) there is no other way for this is "the full and perfect will of God;"
- 3) the Sermon on the Mount is "the whole counsel of God" which is eternal.<sup>66</sup>

John Deschner tended to see the Law, as proposed by Wesley, as an independent item, of the order of creation, rather than of Christ. As Deschner questioned:

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<sup>65</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* proem 2 (BE) 1:470.

<sup>66</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* proem 3: 471.



But in this glorification of the law, and this bestowing on it of a semi-independent status, is there not a real danger, certainly not of two Christs, but of limiting Christ in order to emphasise sanctification? Granting the polemical situation which once evoked this heavy emphasis on the law, is it not possible that Wesley's doctrine of sanctification would be strengthened, not weakened, if the law remained throughout the servant of Christ?<sup>67</sup>

Not many have picked up on this distinction between the order of creation and Christ but it does appear that the result is an almost hypostasising of the Law. This becomes evident in the sermon *The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law*. Wesley moved to the position of granting to the Law a status comparable to Christ. It is not often stated with this certainty but it perhaps suggests the tendency in Wesley to approach moralising notes in his view of sanctification. A lengthy quote from the sermon indicated the strength of Christ as the revelation of God and the close comparison of Christ and the Law:

Now this law is an incorruptible picture of the high and holy One that inhabited eternity. It is he whom in his essence no man hath seen or can see, made visible to men and angels. It is the face of God unveiled; God manifested to his creatures as they are able to bear it; manifested to give and not to destroy life; that they may see God and live. It is the heart of God disclosed to men. Yea, in some sense we may apply to this law what the Apostle says of his Son - it is 'the streaming forth' or outbecoming 'of his glory, the express image of his person.'<sup>68</sup>

Apparently Wesley never saw the implication of this 'hypostasising' of the Law. It leads to moralising and placing salvation outside the person of Christ to the 'person' of the Law. Though an advocate of salvation by Christ alone the quotation from this sermon can be developed to assert a salvation outside the work of Christ to a salvation from the words of Christ; but Wesley never attempted to develop this type of moral influence model.

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<sup>67</sup> Deschner, 107-108.

<sup>68</sup> *The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law* II. 3 (BE) 2: 9.

Still the Christian way of life here described has application for every era of the Church's experience. The purpose of the Sermon on the Mount extended beyond Jesus' immediate disciples, it included all people in every age. As John Wesley reiterated, the Sermon was for, "all the children of men, the whole race of mankind, the children that were yet unborn - all the generations to come even to the end of the world who should ever hear the words of this life."<sup>69</sup> It is important to note that for Wesley there is the expectation that Christian growth is a norm. Christ's teaching is therefore a required part of the Christian life. His language, terms, and phrases make clear that this was not optional. It is important to note, then, that Wesley regarded the Sermon on the Mount as the best summary of the practice of the Christian life.<sup>70</sup>

A brief comparison was made between the Law delivered on Mt. Sinai and the Law delivered by Jesus. The Ten Commandments, which Wesley called, "that brief sketch of holiness delivered by God,"<sup>71</sup> are comparable to the Sermon on the Mount, but Mt. Sinai was a fearful experience of thundering presence while the Law, as described at the beginning of Matthew 5, was delivered with "his still small, voice."<sup>72</sup>

In order to explain the relationship between the offices of Christ in the construct of salvation, we can turn to the thirteenth and final sermon in the series on The Sermon on the Mount. The thirteenth discourse described Jesus as, "Our divine Teacher,"<sup>73</sup> and the final words of The Sermon on the Mount, according to Wesley, set Christ's seal on his teaching, or prophecy. Wesley identified in summary fashion the prophetic work of Christ as, "...the wisdom of him who builds upon a

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<sup>69</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* proem 4: 472.

<sup>70</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* proem 7: 473.

<sup>71</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* proem 7: 473.

<sup>72</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* proem 8: 474.

<sup>73</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth* proem 1 (BE) 1: 687.

rock.”<sup>74</sup> He then proceeded to indicate that whatever a person may do, however righteous his acts appear to be, if the works are human works of righteousness rather than grounded in the faith of Christ’s atonement, then such works are insufficient for receiving Christ’s atonement.<sup>75</sup>

The position grounded in faith begins when, “He sees and feels all his sin, and all his guilt, till it is washed away by the atoning blood...of his utter inability to help himself till he is filled with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.”<sup>76</sup> Only from this position of faith does transformation of the mind issue into a righteous life. Then Wesley could repeat, “How wise is this man!”<sup>77</sup>

The basis of wisdom is Christologically formed. God recognises a person’s righteousness from this position and then Wesley asserted, “he is a wise man, even in God’s account; for ‘he buildeth his house upon a rock,’ upon the Rock of Ages, the everlasting Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>78</sup> This resulted in a person’s assurance, “...I am justified freely by thy grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.”<sup>79</sup> Yet Wesley went on to affirm the continual struggle and temptations such a person must endure throughout life. The hope, as Wesley ascertained, was only in Christ.<sup>80</sup>

Wesley connected the priestly and the prophetic work of Christ through biblical texts such as James 2:14 which combines works through faith and I John 3:3

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<sup>74</sup> *Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth* proem 3: 688.

<sup>75</sup> *Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth* I: 1. 6: 688-691; this is also termed ‘The Almost Christian’ (BE) 1: 131-141.

<sup>76</sup> *Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth, Discourse the Thirteenth* II. 1: 691.

<sup>77</sup> *Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth* II. 2: 692.

<sup>78</sup> *Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth* II. 3: 692

<sup>79</sup> *Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth* II. 3: 693.

<sup>80</sup> *Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth* II. 4: 693.



which describes a 'real Christian' as being purified as God is pure.<sup>81</sup> From this foundation Wesley repeatedly asserted that the great danger of Christianity was in separating 'inward religion' from 'outward religion'. The two extremes were the neglect of the inward with an emphasis on the outward performance of duty (legalism), or, the neglect of the outward performance of duty because of an overemphasis on the inward life (mysticism).<sup>82</sup>

Wesley's emphasis was to keep justification and sanctification distinct, but inseparably related. His published sermon, *Justification by Faith* (1746), clarified the language of an outward, objective work, and, an inward, subjective work. Justification was outward while sanctification was inward, restoring the image of God in humanity. Similarities with John Calvin on this point are notable. Calvin responded negatively to those who attempted to defend the position that faith did not require an appropriate response in life. He maintained the distinction but united justification and sanctification; this is pointed out in a reference which demonstrates Calvin's Christological focus:

Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond, so that those whom he illumines by his wisdom, he redeems; those whom he redeems, he justifies; those whom he justifies, he sanctifies.

But, since the question concerns only righteousness and sanctification, let us dwell upon these. Although we may distinguish them, Christ contains both of them inseparably in himself. Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness in Christ? You must first possess Christ; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctification, because he cannot be divided into pieces (I Cor. 1:13). Since, therefore, it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy, he bestows both of them at the same time, the one never without the other.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth* II. 5: 695.

<sup>82</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Seventh* proem 1. 4: 592-594.

<sup>83</sup> *Institutes* III. XVI. 1.

François Wendel added the comment, "...for Calvin, justification and sanctification are two graces of equal value. The author of the *Institutes* finds himself here in reaction against the unilateral accentuation of justification that one meets within Luther and his disciples."<sup>84</sup> This also finds resonance in Wesley.

John Wesley made his own division of the Sermon on the Mount into three "branches" by chapter divisions. Chapter 5 was the "sum of all true religion laid down in eight particulars;" Chapter 6 explained the rules for right intention which are evident in outward action; and , Chapter 7 outlined the hindrances to holiness.<sup>85</sup> With this introductory summary now constructed it is possible to begin to give a fuller description of Wesley's understanding of the prophetic office of Christ which creates holiness of life.

# 1. The Stages of Christian Growth According to the Sermon on the Mount

## a. Initial Stage - The Consciousness of Sin

John Wesley believed that the Sermon on the Mount was intended for all people and the Beatitudes were an account of the various stages of the Christian life. It is important to note that in the process of moving through the stages that we do not ignore or dispense with the previous stage otherwise we begin to lose the dynamic process of human experience which Wesley accepted as integral to his theology. This is part of the experiential side of keeping in mind the totality of experience.<sup>86</sup> The foundation begins at the place of the 'poor in spirit'. There is similarity with William

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<sup>84</sup> François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origin and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans., Philip Mairet, (Glasgow: William Collins Sons, 1965), 257.

<sup>85</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* proem 10: 474.

<sup>86</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* I. 1: 475.

Law at this point. Law had commented, "We may as well think to see without eyes, or live without breath, as to live in the spirit of religion without the spirit of humility...it is thus the soul and essence of all religious duties."<sup>87</sup> The obvious difference between Wesley and Law was in understanding the place and definition of justification by faith.

'Poverty in spirit', as Wesley also called this stage, was a 'disposition of the heart' which must be recognised before progress in the Christian life can begin. Wesley defined the 'poor in spirit' in this manner: "Who then are the 'poor in spirit'? Without question, the humble; they who know themselves, who are convinced of sin; those to whom God hath given that first repentance which is previous to faith in Christ."<sup>88</sup> John Wesley consigned the designation, the 'poor in spirit', to people who are aware of their sinfulness, their total corruption and have "a deep sense of the loathsome leprosy of sin."<sup>89</sup> This is the state of original sin and a person has a conscious awareness of this state.<sup>90</sup> It is at this point that there is the expectation that the life of the unregenerate has ended and the regenerate is about to begin.<sup>91</sup> All of this is based on what Wesley termed "the righteousness of Christ imputed to us for 'the remission of the sins that are past'."<sup>92</sup>

Accompanying 'the poor in spirit' was the phrase 'they that mourn' and it meant no longer to yearn according to worldly affections or desires, it was to yearn

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<sup>87</sup> William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, Chapter XVI, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1906), 209.

<sup>88</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* I. 4: 477.

<sup>89</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* I. 4: 477.

<sup>90</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* I. 5-6: 478-479.

<sup>91</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* I. 9: 480.

<sup>92</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* I. 11: 481.



after God.<sup>93</sup> This experiential language referred to the people who felt the absence of God and the added weight of sin along with the continual temptation of doubting God's love and goodness. In resisting temptation they resisted the world's pleasures and false promises. The end of mourning came through the presence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>94</sup> But another type of mourning began. The second type was distinct from the first. It was a righteous mourning regarding the sins of the world. This included the awareness that not only the unregenerate are caught in sin, but also the regenerate still can be caught in sin. Wesley described the response to this as:

They still mourn for the sins and miseries of mankind: they 'weep with them that weep'. They weep for them that weep not for themselves, for the sinners against their own souls. They mourn for the weakness and unfaithfulness of those that are in some measure saved from their sins. 'Who is weak and they are not weak? Who is offended, and they burn not?'<sup>95</sup>

The sermon moved from identifying the state of those who have become aware of their sins and are in need of God's regenerating work to a call to persevere with the unregenerate and the struggling saints.

#### b. The Second Stage: Initiating the Thirst for Holiness

John Wesley believed that meekness created a balance in a person's feelings and thoughts. Meekness prevented a person from excess in action or inaction and helped "balance the affections." Such balance was a product of God's grace and did not destroy affections or feelings.<sup>96</sup> Meekness thus came to mean patience or

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<sup>93</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* II. 3: 483.

<sup>94</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* II. 6: 485.

<sup>95</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* II. 6: 486.

<sup>96</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Second* I. 3: 489. For a complete study on Wesley's understanding of affections, see Gregory S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious*

contentedness and has the ability to discern evil, hold the reins on dealing with evil, and gave mastery over a person's passions.<sup>97</sup> This meant that a person could be angry but the anger was to be directed towards sin and not the sinner.<sup>98</sup> He repeated this position in the *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* on Matthew 5:22. There he stated, "We ought not for any cause to be angry at the person of the sinner, but at his sin only." In the passage from Matthew, Wesley considered this instruction to be part of Jesus' role as the Lawgiver who expressed a higher authority than Moses, the Prophets, Paul, John, and the other apostolic writers.

The movement from 'poverty of spirit' to 'meekness' meant that the sin of pride was being replaced by "the native appetite of a heaven-born spirit."<sup>99</sup> The renovation of the person is now evident and a "hunger and thirst after righteousness" is made manifest. Thirst for the image of God, i.e., righteousness, is, as Wesley explained, "the strongest of all our spiritual appetites."<sup>100</sup> We never lose this appetite.

Wesley proceeded to explain 'mercy' as concern for the world that did not seek after God and so it was directly related to 'charity' or 'love'. In order to develop the application of love Wesley turned primarily to I Corinthians 13. This meant a love for humanity which placed a high priority on the actions of promoting the good of the neighbour. At the conclusion of the sermon Wesley denounced the cruelty and evil perpetuated in the name of Christianity and the Church. He thus ended with an

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*Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology*, (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1989).

<sup>97</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Second* I. 5:490.

<sup>98</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Second* I. 8: 491.

<sup>99</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Second* II. 1: 495.

<sup>100</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Second* II. 3: 496.

appeal for a Christian understanding of God filling the heart to the extent that a person is prepared to lay down his or her life in anticipation of the final “reign of Love.”<sup>101</sup>

## 2. The Life of Holiness

*Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third*<sup>102</sup> began with the admonition that the love of God leads to the love of neighbour. Human responsibility is to inquire about this source of love to neighbour for this is the evidence of the ‘pure in heart’. The ‘pure in heart’ refers to, “they whose hearts God hath ‘purified even as he is pure’; who are purified through faith in the blood of Jesus from every unholy affection; who, being ‘cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfect holiness’ in the ‘loving fear of God’.”<sup>103</sup> This is summarised in the same paragraph as, “they love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and mind, and strength.” This description becomes one of Wesley’s common expressions of holiness of life.

The practical side of the dynamic of the process of purifying the heart is expressed in two manners. First, Wesley called for fasting and praying to ascertain the sinful problem that hinders holiness of life; then, there is a seeking after wise counsel by way of a spiritual leader. The Christian community thus becomes active. Wesley counselled against self-examination only since this could be giving in to, “a strong delusion to believe a lie.”<sup>104</sup> All of this leads to personal integrity which Wesley developed in paragraph I. 4-11.<sup>105</sup> This was called the “religion of the heart,”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Second* III. 18: 509.

<sup>102</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third* (BE) 1: 510-530

<sup>103</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third* I. 2:510.

<sup>104</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third* I. 4: 512.

<sup>105</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third* I. 4-11: 512-517.



another expression Wesley used to refer to holiness of life.

But the pure in heart are also people of outward expression and demonstrate their holy intention. These are the 'peacemakers'. The responsibility of the peacemaker is to initiate restoration and reconciliation in human relations.<sup>107</sup> Beyond the immediate circle of family and friends, it includes all human relations, that is, to "manifest his love to neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies." This includes not only help for the poor in their physical destitution but the pure in heart endeavour to encourage social and spiritual well being.<sup>108</sup>

Wesley continued to explain that the pure in heart should expect to face persecution from people of the worldly mind.<sup>109</sup> Yet the pure in heart are not to go out of the way to encourage persecution. This is contrary to the teaching of Christ.<sup>110</sup> Still, persecution can come as it did in the life of Christ. So Wesley advised, "Not unless you have more wisdom than your Master, or more innocence than the Lamb of God,"<sup>111</sup> should one actively seek trouble. The expectation of persecution allows the pure in heart to recognise the world's case against the true Christian but it should not prevent such a person from continuing in obedience to Christ.

The introductory comments to the fourth discourse indicated John Wesley's objection to mysticism without any accompanying outward evidence. Wesley insisted that Christianity was not only an inward religion but also an outward religion, or as he stated, "I shall endeavour to show, first, that Christianity is essentially a social

<sup>106</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third II. 1: 517.*

<sup>107</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third II. 3: 517-518.*

<sup>108</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third II. 4-7: 518-520.*

<sup>109</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third III. 1-10:520-527.*

<sup>110</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third III. 9: 526-527.*

<sup>111</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third III. 10: 527.*

religion, and that to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it; secondly, that to conceal this religion is impossible, as well as utterly contrary to the design of its author.”<sup>112</sup>

He went on to explain that the term ‘Christianity’ is “worshipping God which is here revealed to man by Jesus Christ.”<sup>113</sup> We can note his Christological centre for the prophetic work of Christ. Christianity, according to Wesley, cannot exist without interpersonal relationships. The purpose then of ‘retirement’ or ‘withdrawal’ into solitude is not the purpose of the Christian faith, it is only preparation for its real social purpose.<sup>114</sup> This led to explaining the purpose of being “the salt of the earth,” that is, to be in relation with other Christians and the world.<sup>115</sup> Wesley had already explained the scriptural warrant for separation but it did not include a solitary life or complete removal. The concept of separation for Wesley referred to not being influenced by the world.

John Wesley offered a strong and powerful indictment against Christian solitude as a way of life. A lengthy quotation will suffice to indicate his uncompromising position:

That we may the more diligently labour to season all we can with every holy and heavenly temper, our Lord proceeds to show the desperate state of those who do not impart the religion they have received; which indeed they cannot possibly fail to do, so long as it remains in their own hearts. ‘If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thence good for nothing but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men.’ If ye who were holy and heavenly-minded, and consequently zealous of good works, have no longer that savour in yourselves, and do therefore no longer season others, if you are grown flat, insipid, dead, both careless of your own soul and useless to the souls of other men, ‘wherewith shall’ ye ‘be salted?’ How shall ye be recovered? What help? What hope? Can tasteless salt be restored to its savour? No; ‘it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out’, even as the mire in

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<sup>112</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth* proem. 5: 533.

<sup>113</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth* I. 1: 533.

<sup>114</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth* I. 2: 534.

<sup>115</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth* I. 7: 536-537.

the streets, 'and to be trodden under foot of men', to be overwhelmed with everlasting contempt.<sup>116</sup>

The strong language does indicate the dynamic of Christian experience which can be lost if a person returns to a solitary Christianity. This is strengthened by the portion of scripture in Matthew which indicates that Christians are compared to the 'light of the world' and a 'city set upon a hill upon a hill cannot be hid'. Clearly, the direction in Wesley's thought is that true biblical Christianity is impossible to conceal.<sup>117</sup>

At the end of the sermon there is a response to the objection of making visible the Christian life; it, according to the first objection, leads to the concept of works righteousness. Wesley agreed but then he commented, "let the abuse be taken away and the use remain."<sup>118</sup> To the next objection that it is a waste of time on unresponsive people, Wesley responded that Christians are obligated to follow the example of Christ. Wesley reiterated, "he did not therefore desist from striving to do good" while he was yet rejected.<sup>119</sup> At the conclusion of the sermon Wesley made use of Acts 4:13 by stating, "And although some will harden their hearts, yet others will take knowledge that ye have been with Jesus."<sup>120</sup>

It is important to note that while Christ asserted that he came to fulfil the Law, Wesley insisted that Christ destroyed "all the injunctions and ordinances which related to the old sacrifices and service to the temple."<sup>121</sup> This position, he believed, was supported by Paul, Barnabas, and Peter. It was the moral law that Christ maintained and fulfilled. Wesley appeared at this point to pull back from any notion

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<sup>116</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth* I. 8: 537.

<sup>117</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth* II. 4-7: 540-547.

<sup>118</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth* III. 6: 545.

<sup>119</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth* III. 8: 546.

<sup>120</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth* IV. 3: 548

<sup>121</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fifth* I. 1: 551.



of the imparted active righteousness of Christ to believers. This controversy was a constant thorn in his debates with the Calvinists. Wesley's concern was that those who claimed Christ's obedience as theirs could then, in theory, weaken their obedience to Christ. This would then diminish the effect of Christ's prophetic work in the believer. Wesley insisted that Christ was sinlessly obedient but he was reluctant to make this effective for others. As he stated, "And it cannot be doubted but he did in this sense fulfil every part of it. But this does not appear to be what he intends here, being foreign to the scope of his present discourse."<sup>122</sup> He meant that Christ's sinlessness was not effective for others. Christ's purpose in his sinlessness was to declare the purpose of the moral law in the lives of people.

After a lengthy account of the 'righteousness of the Pharisees', Wesley finally gave an admonishment that distinguishes the Pharisaic hypocrisy from true Christians. He stated, "...their righteousness was partial - whereas the righteousness of a real Christian is universal. He does not observe one, or some parts, of the law of God, and neglect the rest; but keeps all his commandments, loves them all, values them above gold or precious stones."<sup>123</sup> The way of obedience in this sense is a clean heart, or, "clean within," as Wesley put it.<sup>124</sup> Only then can the outward works be genuine.

In John Wesley's analysis of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6 was the chapter that placed the emphasis on the concept of intention. Purity of intention was a key to Wesley's understanding of the Christian life. With regard to Jesus' teaching, Wesley stated, "The necessity of purity of intention he shows, first, with regard to those which are usually accounted religious actions, and indeed are such when

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<sup>122</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fifth* I. 3: 552.

<sup>123</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fifth* IV. 10: 567.

<sup>124</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fifth* IV. 11: 568.

performed with a right intention.”<sup>125</sup> Wesley then divided purity of intention into two categories: works of piety and works of charity or mercy.

Purity of intention had to do with inward motivation which became expressed in outward action. Outward action would not be comprehensible without knowing the inward intention. Wesley believed that Matthew 6 clarified this. There were two basic intentions: one is to act for the glory of God, the other is to act for one's own glory.

The tension between the two is acknowledged by the outward act.<sup>126</sup> Wesley then gave this practical advice regarding outward acts, “When you are fully persuaded in your own mind that by your not concealing the good which is done either you will yourself be enabled, or others excited, to do the more good, then you may not conceal it: then let your light appear and ‘shine to all that are in the house’.”<sup>127</sup> The alternative is to act in secret which could be appropriate according to the circumstance.

This is advanced further in Wesley's discussion on the Lord's Prayer, in the statement, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Consistent with John Wesley's understanding of Christian obedience he stated, “We pray, not so much for a passive as for an active conformity to the will of God in saying, ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’.”<sup>128</sup>

In the analysis of purity of intention in Matthew 6, Wesley pointed out three parts to obedience. There was a willing service, a continual service, and a perfect service.<sup>129</sup> These comprised the inner intention of the heart. Wesley placed the goal of

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<sup>125</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Sixth* proem. 2: 573.

<sup>126</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Sixth* I. 2: 574.

<sup>127</sup> *Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Sixth* I. 4: 575.

<sup>128</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Sixth* III. 9: 583.

<sup>129</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Sixth* II. 10: 584.

the Christian life in language comparable to what he believed the angelic hosts were doing in heaven:

When therefore we pray that the 'will of God' may 'be done on earth as it is in heaven', the meaning is that all the inhabitants of the earth, even the whole race of mankind, may do the will of their Father which is in heaven as *willingly* as the holy angels; that these may do it *continually*, even as they, without any interruption of their willing service. Yea, and that they may do it *perfectly*; that 'the God of peace through the blood of the everlasting covenant, may make them perfect in every good work to do his will, and work in them all which is well-pleasing in his sight'.<sup>130</sup>

We again read of the Christological example that is provided and becomes the focus of Wesley's intention. In the eighth sermon in the series he commented regarding the relationship a person was to enjoy 'in Christ':

But how much more to see the sun of righteousness continually shining upon the soul! And if there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any peace that passeth all understanding, if any rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, they all belong to him whose eye is single. Thus is his 'whole body full of light'. He walketh in the light as God is in the light, rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks, *enjoying* whatever is the will of God concerning him in Christ Jesus.<sup>131</sup>

The opposite of this is living a life of death: "You have murdered your own soul. You have extinguished the last spark of spiritual life therein. Now indeed, in the midst of life you are in death. You are a living man, but a dead Christian."<sup>132</sup>

Wesley continued in his series of sermons on Matthew 5-7 to base the Christian life in the teachings and wisdom of Christ. He stated in the ninth sermon an idea that was consistent with other aspects of his thought, "Now God is love, therefore they who resemble him in the spirit of their minds are transformed into the same image. They are merciful even as he is merciful. Their soul is all love. They are kind, benevolent, compassionate, tender-hearted; and that not only to the good and gentle,

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<sup>130</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Sixth* II. 10: 584.

<sup>131</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Eighth* proem 5: 615.

<sup>132</sup> *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fifth* proem 13: 620.



but to the froward.”<sup>133</sup>

Even in describing the inward work of God in the human life Wesley did not ignore that it began in Christ’s atoning substitutionary death. He commented, “‘His righteousness.’ This is all *his* righteousness still: it is his own free *gift* to us, for the sake of Jesus Christ the righteous, through whom alone it is purchased for us. And it is his *work*: it is he alone that worketh it in us by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.”<sup>134</sup> This inward work on the heart that leads to a response is grounded in the prior work of God.

John Wesley described the alternative in graphic language, that is, self-made righteousness: “They laboured to establish that outside righteousness which might be very properly termed ‘their own’; for neither was it wrought by the Spirit of God nor was it owned or accepted of him. They might work this themselves, by their own natural strength; and when they had done, it was a stink in his nostrils.”<sup>135</sup>

The final division Wesley created for the Sermon on the Mount dealt with hindrances to the life of holiness. *Discourse the Tenth*<sup>136</sup> identified the continual problem in the Christian life of judging others, of not being careful, or mature, about confidences, and neglect of prayer. *Discourse the Eleventh* was more explicit regarding inward sin and hindrances that come from without a person.

Wesley dealt with voluntary sins quite extensively but the basis of voluntary sins is a corrupt mind. He expressed it in these words: “He must not only be saved

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<sup>133</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Ninth* proem 6: 636.

<sup>134</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Ninth* proem 20: 643.

<sup>135</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Ninth* proem 21:643.

<sup>136</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Tenth* (BE) 1: 650-663.

from all sinful actions and from all evil and useless discourse; but inwardly changed, thoroughly renewed in the spirit of his mind. Otherwise he cannot pass through the gate of life, he cannot enter into glory.”<sup>137</sup> Wesley accounted this sin to all humanity, both the cultured and uncultured, the rich and poor, the religious and non-religious, the wise and the foolish. But his special attention was to the wealthy. John Wesley believed that wealth was a great hindrance to hearing the gospel.<sup>138</sup>

He finally identified false teachers in the Church. These are those who claim to “speak in the name of God”.<sup>139</sup> It followed Wesley’s theological system that assessment of false teachers was based on how effectively their doctrines were related to the application of life. In other words, do their doctrines lead to holiness of life? His questions were: “What are the fruits of their doctrine as to themselves? What effect has it upon their lives...That the mind that is in them which was in Christ Jesus?”<sup>140</sup> Wesley followed this with a question concerning the effect that they had on others.

For Wesley the prophetic work of Christ involved the renewing of the ‘mind that was in Christ Jesus.’ This would be accomplished by a person going through stages within the Christian experience. The Law was a concept that conveyed a meaning of the response to the priestly work of Christ which was the constant work of the teachings of Christ; this was his prophetic role. The intention of the will was important. It was the human mind that needed complete restoration and Christ’s atonement and reconciliation renewed the mind into the image of God.

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<sup>137</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Eleventh* II. 2:668.

<sup>138</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Eleventh* I. 6: 667; II. 6-10: 670-671.

<sup>139</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Twelfth* I. 2: 677.

<sup>140</sup> *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Twelfth* III. 2: 680.

### C. A Plain Account of Christian Perfection<sup>141</sup>

Beginning with Wesley's account of his encounter with holy living, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* moved to describe the central concept of holiness which is love. From this foundation the concept of sin in Wesley's thought will be described.

The relation of holiness and sin became controversial during Wesley's life so an extended analysis of this controversy is required. Finally, the investigation of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* will recognise another controversy over instantaneous and gradual perfection with a concluding explanation of human experience in relation to perfection.

#### 1. Introduction: Personal and Historic Accounts of Holy Living

*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* was one of the key documents that explained John Wesley's account of the Christian life. This document was much more controversial than the thirteen sermons from Matthew 5-7 and in composing the lengthy essay he extracted ideas from Conference *Minutes*, the Hymns of Charles Wesley, the *Preface* to various hymnbooks, other essays, and sermons. In this document Wesley not only clarified his position on Christian perfection, he defended his particular view in response to his critics. Since it is a synopsis of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection it is useful to study *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* as a mature product of his thought. The document went through four

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<sup>141</sup> *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley from the Year 1725, to the Year 1777* (Jackson XI, 366-446). Hereafter the footnote will refer to *APACP*.



editions from the time it was first published in 1766 until 1777.<sup>142</sup> Unfortunately there never has been published a critical edition of the essay and thus work on locating all his sources has yet to be completed. By using *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* it is possible to develop the foundation of Wesley's understanding of the prophetic work of Christ and integrate this document with the other writings of John Wesley.

In the document a summary was offered of Wesley's position on Christian perfection. Summaries were a constant tactic of John Wesley, it made it possible for easier comprehension by lay people and such statements were a perpetual means of clarification. Wesley claimed not to have departed from the early statements on the Christian life and so, like a Creed, this summary can be set in a particular order:

- 1) That Christian perfection is the love of God and our neighbour;
- 2) That it is received merely by faith;
- 3) That it is given instantly, in a moment;
- 4) That we are to expect it, not at death, but every moment; that now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.<sup>143</sup>

Wesley began with his personal account of embracing the thought of Christian perfection. He started with Bishop Jeremy Taylor's book, *Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying*. This he read in 1725 in preparation for ordination as a Deacon.

Wesley stated that he was drawn to the idea of purity of intention. He commented as a result, "Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts, and words, and actions; being thoroughly convinced, there is no medium, but that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil."<sup>144</sup> It can be noted that this is the language typical of conversion and this

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<sup>142</sup> See Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 242, for a brief historical account of the publication of the four editions.

<sup>143</sup> *APACP*, 393

<sup>144</sup> *APACP*, 366.

indicates a type of conversion within John Wesley's life and so he made 1725 a significant event. It can be emphasised that the Aldersgate experience of 1738 does not appear in this work on Christian perfection. In the next year, 1726, he read Thomas à Kempis', *Christian Pattern* (this was Wesley's title to the more familiar, *Imitation of Christ*). Here he commented that he was taught to give his life and heart to God. Within the next two years Wesley read William Law's *Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call* and he learned through William Law to be "all-devoted to God." At this point Wesley concluded his reminiscences on his encounter with holy living.

The appreciation of the Mystics, both Church of England and Roman Catholic, always remained with John Wesley although he could also be their severe critic. As late as 1788, in his sermon, *On God's Vineyard*, he acknowledged his gratitude for the writings of François de Sales, another person he listed among the Roman Catholic mystics.<sup>145</sup> As long as the mystics' theology of holiness could be realigned after justification by faith then they had a valuable contribution to make to the Christian life. Along with the early appreciation of the mystical writers, in 1730 he declared that the Bible had become the "only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion."<sup>146</sup> Near the end of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* he re-emphasised that Christian perfection could be found in scripture, "I found it in the oracles of God, in the Old and New Testament, when I read them with no other view but to save my own soul."<sup>147</sup> With scripture as the primary source Wesley recognised the necessity of a Christological focus to be the standard for his life. He stated in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*:

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<sup>145</sup> *On God's Vineyard* I. 5 (BE) 3:506.

<sup>146</sup> *APACP*, 367; he also wrote, "from the year 1730, when I began to be *homo unius libri*, "a man of one book..."", *APACP*, 373.

<sup>147</sup> *APACP*, 444.

Hence I saw, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having “the mind which was in Christ,” and of “walking as Christ also walked;” even of having, not some part only, but all the mind which was in him; and of walking as he walked, not only in many or in most respects, but in all things. And this was the light, wherein at this time I generally considered religion, as a uniform following of Christ, an entire inward and outward conformity to our Master. Nor was I afraid of anything more, or of other men; of allowing myself in any of the least disconformity to our grand Exemplar.<sup>148</sup>

A person cannot help but notice that his language in this quote is the language of Wesley’s interpretation of the prophetic office of Christ.

In his 1733 sermon at St. Mary’s Church, Oxford University, he preached his early understanding of holiness. This was the sermon, *Circumcision of the Heart*.<sup>149</sup>

His definition of Christian perfection was:

It is that habitual disposition of soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin, ‘from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit;’ and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus; the being so ‘renewed in the image of our mind,’ as to be ‘perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.’<sup>150</sup>

John Wesley proceeded to explain the significance of love and then concluded that his thought on Christian perfection had not been greatly altered over the years. Although the St. Mary’s sermon was a product of his early theological formation and his conversion to ‘holy living’, as reflected in the writings of Jeremy Taylor, Thomas à Kempis, and William Law, he never withdrew the 1733 sermon from his corpus of important documents. Slight editing was done but its essential content always remained.<sup>151</sup> The reason why Wesley continued to support the mystics on Christian perfection was the teleological approach to human growth they affirmed. Yet he actively critiqued William Law and the others who had neglected the objective aspect

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<sup>148</sup> APACP, 367.

<sup>149</sup> *Circumcision of the Heart* (BE) 1: 398-414.

<sup>150</sup> APACP, 367.

<sup>151</sup> Albert Outler, (BE) 1:398-400.



of the atonement. For Wesley the objective priestly work of Christ must precede the subjective appropriation of Christ's atonement. In distinction from the mystical writers Wesley's major change was the realignment of the *ordo salutis*, that is, justification by faith was chronologically prior in salvation.

After Wesley's personal account of turning towards Christian perfection he recorded the testimony he received on August, 1738 from the Swedish Moravian, Arvid Gradin. This had to do with the 'full assurance of faith.' The testimony described the 'rest' of faith or 'peace of mind.' Not only was the mind at rest, Arvid Gradin testified to "a deliverance from every fleshly desire, and a cessation of all, even inward sins."<sup>152</sup> John Wesley claimed that this was the first account he had heard of this kind of spirituality. This can be compared with the later dialogue between Count Ludwig Nicholas von Zinzendorf, the Moravian leader.<sup>153</sup> Zinzendorf's response to Wesley's question regarding Christ working perfection in true Christians was: "By no means. All our perfection is in Christ. All Christian Perfection is, Faith in the blood of Christ. Our whole Christian Perfection is imputed, not inherent. We are perfect in Christ: In ourselves we are never perfect." This was clearly a statement that perfection was grounded in Christ but not imparted to humanity. While Wesley argued strenuously for a required inward change and growth in perfection, Zinzendorf found such a view to be couched in legalism and it was moralistic. Zinzendorf clearly saw his distinctive Lutheran approach as the authentic evangelical faith. On the other hand, the emphasis in Wesley was clear, it centred on inward change.

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<sup>152</sup> *APACP*, 370.

<sup>153</sup> *Journal and Diaries* (BE) 19: 211-215. The conversation recorded by John Wesley on Sept. 3, 1741 was spoken in Latin and Wesley left his record of the dialogue untranslated. The translation used in the Bicentennial Edition is that of Henry Moore.

In a letter to Mrs. Hutton, Wesley constructed an apparently hierarchical appreciative assessment of Calvin, Luther, the Moravians, William Law, and George Whitefield.<sup>154</sup> In Wesley's evaluation of the Moravians he acknowledged the grace of God, deliverance from outward sins, and the discipline of their lives and these were noted with deep appreciation. It was the personal certainty of faith that had originally impressed him in the many conversations with the Moravians. But W.P. Stephens indicated the developing differences between the Moravians and Wesley:

The record that Wesley made of personal testimony and Moravian history show divergences among the Moravians, some of which were to surface later in Wesley's dealing with them such as the emphasis on either Christ in us and Christ for us, the relation between holy communion and a person's faith and between justifying faith and the assurance of faith, and the possibility of agreement on the foundation while differing on some points of doctrine.<sup>155</sup>

Over the English Moravians' use of 'stillness', that is, not receiving any means of grace until the experience of the assurance of salvation, in Philip Molther's theology,<sup>156</sup> W.P. Stephens called John Wesley more Lutheran than the English Moravians.<sup>157</sup>

John Wesley extracted a portion of an early document, *The Character of a Methodist* (1742)<sup>158</sup> and inserted it into *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. The

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<sup>154</sup> *To Mrs. Hutton*, August 22, 1744 (Letters II, Telford, 25): "I love Calvin a little, Luther more; the Moravians, Mr. Law, and Mr. Whitefield far more than either."

<sup>155</sup> W.P. Stephens, "Wesley and the Moravians," in *John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed., John Stacey, (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 31. In Wesley's *Journal*, Aug-Sept., 1738 (Curnock, II: 28-63), there is a lengthy account of the visit Wesley made to Germany to meet the Moravians. It includes important personal conversations with many of the Moravians and it is a very positive account of this early visit.

<sup>156</sup> Albert Outler commented, "Molther's vigorous advocacy of 'stillness' offended Wesley, in turn, he was offended by Wesley's insistence upon faith and good works *together*, JWO, 353.

<sup>157</sup> Stephens, 34. For further appreciation of the Moravians see the *Journal* (Curnock II, 378, 441-500) and *Letters* (Telford II: 54; V: 294; VI: 141). Wesley had begun to note that the Moravians were not united in their beliefs on assurance of salvation. Herbert McGonigle explained, "Wesley noted what was said and compared it with Böhler's teaching. Whereas Böhler taught that a penitent cannot have justifying faith unless he knows it, the Count stressed that the assurance of justification may not come until much later," *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 108-109.

<sup>158</sup> *The Character of a Methodist* (BE) 9: 30-46.

emphasis was on love to God, love to neighbour and to one's enemy. This was possible because God, through love, "has purified his heart from envy, malice, wrath, and every unkind temper."<sup>159</sup> This is replaced with "mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering." Wesley described the life of a person devoted to God to be influenced by such a devotion that involved every aspect of life, from the smallest incident to the largest controversies. Importantly, such a style of life meant a devotion to the good of humanity.

## 2. Holiness and Love

There was a variety of terms and phrases Wesley used to describe holiness of life but at the foundation of John Wesley's thought was the concept of the love of God.<sup>160</sup> There were two aspects to love: first, was the love of God towards humanity, that is the objectiveness of love; then, there was humanity's responsive love to God and neighbour, that was the subjective aspect of love.<sup>161</sup> Love was described as the goal of the Christian life and a summary was found in his 1781 sermon *On Zeal*. Wesley clearly indicated the requirement of growth in love: It is the highest calling from God and from it all other values and work receive their meaning:

But our choicest zeal should be reserved for love itself, the end of the commandment, the fulfilling of the law. The church, the ordinances, outward works of every kind, yea, all other holy tempers, are inferior to this, and rise in value only as they approach nearer and nearer to it. Here then is the great object of Christian zeal. Let every true believer in Christ apply with all fervency of spirit to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that his heart

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<sup>159</sup> *APACP*, 372.

<sup>160</sup> For a comprehensive assessment of John Wesley and a systematic approach to the Wesleyan theology of experience see Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *The Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972).

<sup>161</sup> Lindström, 61, "Christian love is a factor in the objective events of atonement and justification and in the subjective transformation of new birth and subsequent sanctification. In the former we see God's love to man, in the latter man's love to God and his neighbour."



may be more and more enlarged in love to God and to all mankind. This one thing let him do: let him 'press on to this prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'<sup>162</sup>

It is possible to see in John Wesley's theology the integrated connection between God's love revealed in the atonement and the consequent emphasis on humanity's growth in love. Faith, according to Wesley, is necessary to re-establish love which is prior in the order of creation. Faith then is the prerequisite in human life for from faith love proceeds into the human heart. Therefore he placed faith in a place of great importance in this manner of thought. Wesley stated:

Faith alone it is which effectually answers this end, as we learn from daily experience. For so long as we walk by faith, not by sight, we go swiftly on in the way of holiness. While we steadily look, not at the things that are seen, but at those which are not seen, we are more and more crucified to the world and the world crucified to us. Let but the eye of the soul be constantly fixed, not on the things that are temporal, but on the things that are eternal, and our affections are more and more loosened from earth and fixed on things above. So that faith in general is the most direct and effectual means of promoting all righteousness and true holiness; of establishing the holy and spiritual law in the hearts of them that believe.<sup>163</sup>

The sermon concludes with, "Now use all the knowledge and love and life and power you have already attained. So you shall continually go on from faith to faith. So shall you daily increase in holy love, till faith is swallowed up in sight, and the law of love established to all eternity."<sup>164</sup> But God's love must always precede human love. This concept of the priority of God's love was a consistent theme throughout John Wesley's work.<sup>165</sup>

John Wesley continually linked the idea that the human love returned to God

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<sup>162</sup> *On Zeal II*. 11 (BE) 3: 315.

<sup>163</sup> *The Law Established by Faith II*, III. 2: 41.

<sup>164</sup> *The Law Established by Faith II*, III. 6: 43.

<sup>165</sup> *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743), 61 (BE) 11: 70, is a useful example among many.

was a natural outcome of God's love to humanity:

'If God *so* loved us' - observe, the stress of the argument lies on this very point: 'so loved us' as to deliver up his only Son to die a cursed death for our salvation! 'Beloved, what manner of love is this', wherewith God hath loved us! So as to give his *only Son*! in glory equal with the Father, in Majesty co-eternal!<sup>166</sup>

It was in this sense that he could develop the idea of 'disinterested love.' After explaining in his letter to Conyers Middleton the concept of universal love to God and neighbour including enemies, the outcome is, "His love, as to these, so to all mankind, is in itself generous and disinterested; springing from no view of advantage to himself, from no regard to profit or praise; no, nor even the pleasure of loving."<sup>167</sup> Disinterested love had been described by the medieval theologian, Bernard of Clairvaux.<sup>168</sup> Later in his brief work Bernard stated that this deified love can be attained only at the general resurrection due to the limitations of the physical body. At the general resurrection the physical body will be maintained but no longer as a hindrance to disinterested love.<sup>169</sup> Wesley distinguished himself from this medieval saint by insisting that disinterested love could be experienced prior to death.

John Wesley did propose that there should be a particular emphasis on love for fellow Christians, especially for fellow strugglers in the Methodist bands and societies. We should note the emphasis on the advocacy of a graded love. It was the same love for all humanity but in a more intensified form.<sup>170</sup> Wesley appears to have

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<sup>166</sup> *God's Love to Fallen Man* I. 5 (BE) 2: 428.

<sup>167</sup> *Letter to the Rev. Dr. Conyers Middleton Occasional by his late "Free Inquiry" VI. 6* (Jackson X, 68). This is repeated in the sermon *The New Birth* II. 5 (BE) 2: 194: "...when it is 'renewed after the image of God', 'in righteousness and true holiness', when the love of the world is changed into the love of God, pride into humility, passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind."

<sup>168</sup> *On the Love of God*, (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1950), Chapter Ten, 64, "Happy is he who can attain the fourth degree of love, and love *himself* only for God's sake!"

<sup>169</sup> *On the Love of God*, 70-71.

<sup>170</sup> Lindström, 192-193: "There is also a third area of love, an inner circle within that of Christian brotherly love. This comprises those to whom the Christian is joined not only in the Spirit but

developed this idea from the Epistles of John. Importantly, this explanation of Wesley's concept of love helps to alleviate various interpretations accusing Wesley of individualism and the Enlightenment influence. Wesley does not appear to be overly individualistic, he does express a personalism but this is due to the impersonal God of Deist theology which would inevitably de-emphasise a personal encounter with God, and, its emphasis on a rationalism springing out of the Enlightenment.

This also expresses the causal approach in John Wesley's theology. God's love was always the source, or cause, of human love; it was impossible for human love to originate in itself. Obedience to God could only spring out of the awareness of God's love. Harald Lindström created a useful summary of Wesley's thinking on this point. Lindström believed that this way of working out a theology of love was grounded in John Calvin:

It is accorded to man by a Divine act of self-revelation. When determined in this way by its Divine origin it is clear that love acquires a causal character. Man loves God because God has loved him. His love is a natural result of God's. It is a reciprocal love, the immediate outcome of God's love. We have also seen that this Reformed, causal train of thought is linked up with a fundamental teleology in the idea of love.<sup>171</sup>

It is only in this manner that the mystics with the emphasis on purity of intention could be incorporated into Wesley's theology. Purity of intention must be grounded in the love of God revealed through Christ's objective atonement.

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also by all the outward bonds of Christian fellowship; those who belong to the same congregation and in whose company he receives the same means of grace. These are his nearest, his dearest brothers. These he regards as his own family. As with the case between the love of the two other circles, there is again no distinction in kind. The difference is in degree. Thus love increases in degree from circle to circle in proportion as the area of the object of love shrinks."

<sup>171</sup> Lindström, 184. Cf. *The Circumcision of the Heart* I. 12 (BE) 1: 408, "One design ye are to pursue to the end of time - the enjoyment of God in time and in eternity. Desire other things so far as they tend to this." This bears striking similarity to *The Westminster Confession*, "The Larger Catechism," Question 1: 'What is the chief and highest end of man?' Answer: 'Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever.'



John Wesley gave an account of the opposition to his teaching on Christian perfection but he claimed that it did not come immediately. It did come, though, from those who claimed that, “there is no perfection on earth.”<sup>172</sup> This Wesley stated was a surprise since he and Charles affirmed justification by faith and, as a result, the whole of the Christian life was grounded in the grace of God. Wesley gave a brief account of the 1740 meeting with the Bishop of London, Dr. Gibson. When the Bishop heard what Wesley was preaching he encouraged him to continue. We might note that the major criticism directed against Wesley came from the Lutheran Moravians and the Calvinist theologians, whether Dissenters or within the Church of England. The Moravians and Calvinists were not unified but they did believe that John Wesley placed holiness at too high an experiential level.

### 3. Original Sin and Humanity

In John Wesley’s sermon *On Sin in Believers*,<sup>173</sup> he summarised the *BCP*

Article IX, ‘Of Original or Birth-sin:’

Original sin [...] is the corruption of the nature of every man [...] whereby man is [...] in his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth contrary to the Spirit. [...] And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek φρονεμα σαρκος, [...] is not subject to the law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe [...], yet this lust hath of itself the nature of sin.

This account of the *BCP*’s position is a précis of the larger statement. Another account of original sin was given in his *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (1784). There Article VII, *Of Original or Birth-sin*, read:

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<sup>172</sup> *APACP*, 374.

<sup>173</sup> *On Sin in Believers* I. 3 (BE) 1: 318.

Original Sin standeth not in the following Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.<sup>174</sup>

Late in his life Wesley offered a definition of original sin that resonated with his earlier views: “original sin is the depravation of the whole nature, consisting of the privation of original righteousness, and an inclination to all manner of evil; derived from Adam to all his posterity by natural generation, whereby they stand guilty of eternal life.”<sup>175</sup> He would follow this with the belief that original sin was “not only a loss of original righteousness, but a hereditary infection or spiritual corruption...they are the main things in original sin, so the one necessarily follows the other.”<sup>176</sup>

The definition of sin in the ‘Larger Catechism’ of *The Westminster Confession* stated, “Sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature.” It will be argued that Wesley agreed with this definition but refined it further in his work on Christian perfection. This sinfulness was “the guilt of Adam’s first sin” and from this original sin “proceed all actual transgressions.”<sup>177</sup>

Wesley believed that there were two evils that flowed from Adam. There was the depravation of our nature and then there was the guilt of original sin. This would be solved by justification which dealt with guilt and regeneration which dealt with depravation. Wesley stated, “If we had not this double sin, we should not need this

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<sup>174</sup> *John Wesley’s Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, (United Methodist Publishing House and the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and the Ministry, 1984), 309.

<sup>175</sup> “The True Original of the Soul,” *Arminian Magazine* (6) 1783, 434.

<sup>176</sup> “The True Original of the Soul,” 492.

<sup>177</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin, According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience* Part II. 5, (Jackson IX, 265).

double remedy.”<sup>178</sup> Randy Maddox suggests that Wesley moved away from the emphasis on guilt to the Eastern idea of corruption in the later stage of his life.<sup>179</sup> Corruption, in the Eastern tradition centred on death as the result of sin, and again, this is not absent from western theology. But here we see that guilt, a particular theological mark in the western tradition, remained with Wesley. It is noticeable that the definition of original sin did not change over the years. Wesley was consistent within the western theological tradition, particularly in reference to Pelagianism and guilt.

To the question, ‘Why is there sin in the world?’, Wesley answered on the basis of the free will of humanity:

Because man was created in the image of God: because he is not mere matter, a clod of earth, a lump of clay, without sense or understanding, but a spirit like his creator; a being endued not only with sense and understanding but also with a will exerting itself in various affections. To crown all the rest, he was endued with liberty, a power of directing his own affections and actions, a capacity for determining himself of choosing good or evil. Indeed had not man been endued with this, his understanding would have been of no service.<sup>180</sup>

The origin of evil in humanity was found in the free will of humanity, yet Wesley believed that all the wisdom of the world could not have discovered this had not God revealed this to humanity.<sup>181</sup>

Wesley had several expressions which identified the evidence of original sin. One primary term was self-will. Wesley stated that self-will originally lay in Satan.

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<sup>178</sup> “The True Original of the Soul,” 433

<sup>179</sup> Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 75.

<sup>180</sup> *On the Fall of Man* proem. 1 (BE) 2: 400-401.

<sup>181</sup> *On the Fall of Man* proem. 2: 401.



He asserted, "See self-will, the first born of Satan!"<sup>182</sup> After identifying self-will Wesley directly connected pride to self-will, "See pride, the twin sister of self-will. Here is the true origin of evil." To this can be added his comment, "Satan has stamped his own image on our hearts in self-will also."<sup>183</sup> According to Wesley, Satan had tried to reach a level of equality with God which led to the conclusion that pride was also a part of the origin of evil. Independence is then added to the accumulative problem.<sup>184</sup> These words are all used as close synonyms to mean that people are doing their own will rather than the will of God.

Original sin could also be called the inward root which was described as "enmity against God, atheism, pride, self-will, and idolatry."<sup>185</sup> This language of sin in physical or substance terms was not uncommon in Wesley<sup>186</sup> and he never attempted to resolve the substantival sin language with his relational concept of holiness. The reason why humanity could so easily ignore the severity of the enmity against God was the deceitfulness of sin which was its very nature. Humanity under the dominion of sin was incapable of grasping the true nature of the captivity. Wesley constantly asserted that sin was common to all humanity and was as prevalent in a Christian culture as non-Christian cultures. Sin not only was deceptive it also was instrumental in creating rebellion against God. The Fall was described in this language:

By this wilful act of disobedience to his Creator, this flat rebellion against his sovereign, he openly declared that he would no longer have God to rule over him; that he would be governed by his will, and not the will of him that

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<sup>182</sup> *The Deceitfulness of the Human Heart* I. 1 (BE) 4: 152; the term 'firstborn of Satan' came from "The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians" VII, (*The Apostolic Fathers*, eds., J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer), 171.

<sup>183</sup> *Original Sin* II. 8 (BE) 2:179.

<sup>184</sup> *Original Sin* II.8: 179.

<sup>185</sup> *The Deceitfulness of the Human Heart* I. 4: 155.

<sup>186</sup> See *The Repentance of Believers* I. 20 (BE) 1: 346.

created him, and that he would not seek his happiness in God, but in the world in the works of his hands.<sup>187</sup>

Clearly this is an Augustinian concept of the Fall, it is centred in rebellion, not ignorance. At this point Wesley shows the thorough western theological influence in his thought.

In his *Journal*, dated March 28, 1761, Wesley wrote that he had taken time to draw out the implications of the relation of sin to believers. This resulted in the composition, *On Sin in Believers*.<sup>188</sup> The sermon was written to counter the view that sin no longer remained, or mattered, in those who were justified by faith. Thus the relation of justification and sin was crucial. The conclusion that Wesley reached was that the justified believer still had sin remaining in his or her life and when the question was asked, "But can Christ be in the same heart where sin is?" Wesley confidently answered, "Undoubtedly he can; otherwise it never could be saved, therefrom. Where sickness is, there is the physician."<sup>189</sup>

Wesley's basis for asserting this was grounded in his understanding of the relation between scripture, experience, and tradition. He established four points to clarify his position against complete cleansing at justification:

- 1.) it is contrary to the whole tenor of scripture;
- 2.) it is contrary to the experience of the children of God;
- 3.) it is absolutely new, never heard of in the world till yesterday;
- 4.) it is naturally attended with the fatal consequences, not only grieving those whom God has not grieved, but perhaps dragging them into everlasting perdition.<sup>190</sup>

Leo Cox outlined the three descriptions that Wesley chose to identify sin. There was

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<sup>187</sup> *The New Birth* I. 2 (BE) 2: 189.

<sup>188</sup> *On Sin in Believers* (BE) 1: 314-334.

<sup>189</sup> *On Sin in Believers* III. 8: 323.

<sup>190</sup> *On Sin in Believers* III. 10: 325; this is repeated in the sermon, *The Deceitfulness of the Human Heart* II. 5: 157.

the sin related to justification and immediate regeneration, there was the sin related to entire sanctification, and then there was the sin of infirmities, ignorance, and the limitations of humanity. It is in the first area that Cox presents a rather confusing picture. He stated,

Wesley believed that one fact about the sin problem is settled when the sinner is regenerated. The one born of God does not commit sin. The youngest and weakest child of God is finished with this kind of sin. As long as he possesses this living faith, he does not wilfully transgress a known law of God. The only way the believer could ever again sin in this sense is to backslide and lose his justifying faith.<sup>191</sup>

This is an overstatement of Wesley's concept of sin in the initially sanctified. The next paragraph from Leo Cox states this better, "The 'sin in believers' for Wesley was very real and needed the cleansing Blood." Wesley proposed that there were two principles at work in the believer, "nature and grace, the flesh and the Spirit."<sup>192</sup> He answered the question, "'But was he not then 'freed from all sin' so that there is no sin in his heart?' I cannot say this: I cannot believe it, because St. Paul says the contrary."<sup>193</sup>

Wesley stated that the doctrine of original sin is a 'shibboleth;' that is, it is a necessary part of the total construction of Christian beliefs.<sup>194</sup> Albert Outler's editorial comment is also useful at this point. He indicated that "this sermon was a major doctrinal statement in which he (Wesley) sought to compound the Latin tradition of total depravity with the Eastern Orthodox view of sin as disease and of salvation as θεραπεία ψυχης."<sup>195</sup> The difficulty with this statement concerns the

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<sup>191</sup> Leo Cox, *John Wesley's Concept of Christian Perfection*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1964), 168.

<sup>192</sup> *On Sin in Believers* II. 2 (BE) 1: 322.

<sup>193</sup> *On Sin in Believers* III. 1: 321.

<sup>194</sup> *Original Sin* III. 3, 184.

<sup>195</sup> *Original Sin*, 171.



recognition that therapeutic salvation is not limited to the Eastern Fathers, it is very much an idea in western theology. Augustine and Calvin were major examples of theologians who were comfortable in describing salvation in therapeutic language.<sup>196</sup>

Added to this is the certainty of Wesley's understanding that Adam was created perfect, free from any physical, emotional, spiritual flaws. Randy Maddox then comments, "One should not read too much into this, however, because he apparently did not realise that there was an alternative developmental view of original humanity in earlier Christian tradition."<sup>197</sup> That the early Christian tradition held to a developmental creation story is true, it is found in the second century theologian Irenaeus.<sup>198</sup> That Wesley was unaware of this tradition is not as obvious as Maddox implies. In Wesley's *A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Conyers Middleton*, he answered Middleton's varied attack on Irenaeus by taking the position of defending Irenaeus. The criticism against Irenaeus did not involve his doctrine of creation but Wesley was certainly informed about his thought. It would not be too difficult to think that he knew Irenaeus' theology better than Maddox recognises. Added to this is Wesley's comment on Luke 3:43. There Wesley interpreted the text to mean, "So our Lord passed through and sanctified every stage of human life."<sup>199</sup> This is an unmistakable

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<sup>196</sup> Augustine was not adverse to speaking of the renewal and reformation of the mind in the metaphor of healing. An example of this is *On the Trinity* XIV. 20 (LCC, 117-121). He expounded on renewal with the metaphor of healing through forgiveness, baptism, and daily advances in spiritual growth, *On the Trinity* XIV. 23 (LCC, 121-122). In *The City of God Against the Pagans*, (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1998, 487) healing is based on the love of God. Trevor Hart has summarised John Calvin's position on healing through his Christology. Thus, "The Son of God has taken our humanity and has joined it to his eternal divinity, healing it from its broken state, and conforming it to his creative will," in, "Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind: Salvation as Participation in our Substitution in the Theology of John Calvin," *SJT* 42.1 (1989): 83.

<sup>197</sup> Maddox, 67.

<sup>198</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III. 22.4 (ANF, Vol. 1), humanity was created as children; *AH* IV. 38.2 demonstrates that humanity was not created as complete adults but needed to grow. This is repeated in his *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans., John Behr, (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), Part One. I.[12].

<sup>199</sup> *ENNT*: Luke 3:43.

paraphrase of Irenaeus.<sup>200</sup> Since it is likely that Wesley knew the developmental version of creation he appeared to have deliberately rejected the idea for a complete creation of a fully developed human who had no need for further growth.<sup>201</sup>

#### 4. Sin as Personal and Corporate

His language described sin in the imagery of an inherited illness which had infected every human being. With this general overall description of the nature of sin Wesley then specifically wrote as though sin was alive, stating, "The contagion had spread itself through the inner man; had tainted the seat of their principles, and the source of their actions."<sup>202</sup> People, according to this, are only evil. This was a continual emphasis in Wesley. In the 1783 *Arminian Magazine* Wesley would hold to this early language and speak in terms that sin "hath infected every man that comes into the world, is manifested throughout the scripture."<sup>203</sup>

Some important points are to be made. Since sin is a contagion, it is compared to a disease. In moral terms it is a corrupting influence. We are immediately confronted with a particular theology of sin; sin is more than individual action, and since sin has the characteristic of invading its host with destructive effect, Wesley extended the corruption into all social groups and institutions. Basing his comments on the observation of secular literature along with scripture, there was a demonstration

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<sup>200</sup> AH III. 18. 7 - "He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God."

<sup>201</sup> It must be admitted that later in his study, Maddox does recognise Wesley's knowledge of Irenaeus but this only adds strength to the case that Wesley probably rejected the developmental creation idea, 286.

<sup>202</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Part I.I.1, 197.

<sup>203</sup> "The True Original of the Soul," 432.

that no one and no group had escaped the devastation of sin.<sup>204</sup>

Wesley continuously repudiated all human culture since it tended in the direction of violence, thus demonstrating the personal and social evils of society. His intention was to identify that, "all nations, Pagan, Mohametan, and Christian, do, in fact, make this their last resort, what further proof do we need of the utter degeneracy of all nations from the plainest principles of reason and virtue? Of the absolute want, both of common sense and common humanity, which runs through the whole race of mankind?"<sup>205</sup> According to Wesley, what has been excluded from a healthy spiritual life because of sin is not only scripture but "reason, virtue, humanity." Harald Lindström recognised Wesley's collective interpretation to sin but he regarded the 'individualist' approach as particularly important. He believed that what he thought to be Wesley's individualist approach was grounded in a "near affinity with the Enlightenment, this is the outcome of his Arminian strain."<sup>206</sup>

Wesley concluded Part I of his *Doctrine of Original Sin* with the analysis that sin was not limited to an individual problem but it was a social problem. He forcefully stated: "Still, then, sin is the baleful source of affliction; and consequently, the flood of miseries which covers the face of the earth, - which overwhelms not only single persons but whole families, towns, cities, kingdoms, - is a demonstrative proof of the

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<sup>204</sup> Rupert Davies believed that John Wesley had a comprehensive and thorough doctrine of sin, 'Our Doctrines,' *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 1, 147-179. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop added, "No Calvinist could express more radically than he the depth of human sin and devilishness," *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972), 91.

<sup>205</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part I.II. 10, 223.

<sup>206</sup> Lindström, 34. There has been no complete study on Wesley and the Enlightenment and so this type of general statement is not easy to assess. It can also be asserted that pre-Reformation Humanism had an influence on what can be termed individualism, see for example, A.C. Dickens, *The Age of Humanism and Reformation: Europe in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, (London: Prentice-Hall International, Inc., 1977) and Roland Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, (London: William Collins Sons and Co., Ltd., 1969).



overflowing of ungodliness in every nation under heaven.”<sup>207</sup>

The assessment of Reinhold Niebuhr is useful here. Niebuhr provided a very judicious evaluation of Wesley’s concept of sin, particularly in his, at times, heated debates with the Moravians. As Niebuhr described the various perfectionist groups he believed that Wesley “contains the largest Biblical element.”<sup>208</sup> Niebuhr also considered Wesley to be working within the western theological framework and not in the Eastern model. But Niebuhr slipped into a stereotype when he stated, “It is not possible to consider all the complexities of Wesley’s perfectionism. It ought to be mentioned, however, that some of his perfectionist claims arise from a Pelagian doctrine of sin.”<sup>209</sup> That Wesley had a complex doctrine of perfection is accurate but this also implies that he had a complex doctrine of sin and it clearly did not show signs of Pelagianism, instead it was a refinement on the Augustinian-Reformed understanding of sin.<sup>210</sup>

## 5. Christology, Sin and Reconciliation

Dr. John Taylor was a non-Conformist and Unitarian minister from Norwich. In 1740 he published an influential treatise, *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*. Taylor’s study on sin was so significant that it received many critical responses, notably Isaac Watts wrote, *Ruin and Recovery of*

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<sup>207</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part I.II. 15, 238.

<sup>208</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. 2, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 173.

<sup>209</sup> Niebuhr, 175, footnote 15.

<sup>210</sup> The possibility of free human choice for salvation was the Pelagian agenda. Evidence was given in this dissertation in Part Two, Chapter III, D. 1 on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and preventing grace that human choice for salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life, 121-150.

*Mankind* and Jonathan Edwards wrote, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758),<sup>211</sup> as reaction against John Taylor. John Wesley published his own response in 1757 and it became his largest single theological work.<sup>212</sup> In a personal letter to John Taylor Wesley connected a series of Christian doctrines that held together the whole identity of Christianity, in other words, Wesley wanted to emphasise that one doctrine was related to another:

for, take away the scriptural doctrine of Redemption or Justification, and that of the New Birth, the beginning of sanctification, or (which amounts to the same) explain them as you do, and suitably to your doctrine of Original Sin, and what is Christianity better than Heathenism?<sup>213</sup>

Wesley also established a critical concern over the lack of emphasis on the deity of Christ in John Taylor's deism. Taylor's position was a version of Christ as the Exemplar of atonement. Reconciliation was achieved through Christ's obedience that did not require the classic two natures of Christ. According to John Taylor, the basis of salvation was the character of Christ. As Wesley quoted Taylor, he explained it as:

it was his being slain; that is, his obedience to God, and good-will to man: It was his consuming virtue. 'Thou art worthy:' - Why? Because thou hast exhibited to God such an instance of virtue, obedience, and goodness. Thou hast sacrificed thy life in the cause of truth, and 'hast redeemed us' by that act of the highest obedience.<sup>214</sup>

Wesley concluded that in view of John Taylor's theology, salvation did not require Christ. Since Taylor understood that the grace of God which vouchsafed for Adam was effective for us and formed the basis for a Socinian version of the universality of

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<sup>211</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Works of Isaac Watts*, Vol. 6, eds. Rev. Dr. Jennings and Rev. Dr. Doddridge, (London: J. Barfield, 1753, 1810), 49-188; *Jonathan Edwards: Basic Writings*, Ola Elizabeth Winslow, ed., (New York: The New American Library, 1966), 224-232. Both Watts and Edwards fully accepted the Augustinian doctrine of original sin and challenged John Taylor on that basis.

<sup>212</sup> For a comprehensive summary of the Taylor/Wesley relationship see A. Skevington Wood, *Revelation and Reason: Wesleyan Responses to Eighteenth Century Rationalism*, (Ilkeston: The Wesley Fellowship, 1992), 29-48.

<sup>213</sup> *To Dr. Taylor, of Norwich* July 3, 1759 (Telford IV), 67.

<sup>214</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part II.I. 18. 4, 260.

salvation, Wesley stated, "Indeed they have no great need of Jesus Christ, according to your account."<sup>215</sup>

In John Wesley's manner of thinking, Romans 5:12-19 called for the acceptance of the position that Adam was the human representative, therefore, all are sinners and all commit sin and are thus dead. Through the other representative, Christ, "the many" receive the gift of grace which amounts to salvation. The benefit given to humanity is "grace, or the favour of God, justification, righteousness, or sanctification, and eternal life."<sup>216</sup> These various words summarised the total experience of salvation. Wesley continually asserted that Christ's salvation in the present had greater benefit than the righteousness lost through Adam. So he concluded, "Christ raises believers to a far greater happier state than that which Adam enjoyed in paradise."<sup>217</sup>

This Christological centre is important since life is never complete before death; therefore, this life is to be Christologically understood. Wesley stated, "The holiest of men still need Christ, as their prophet, as 'the light of the world'."<sup>218</sup> There is the work of growth in wisdom, knowledge and morality. He also added, "They still need Christ as their King; for God does not give them a stock of holiness. But unless they receive a supply every moment, nothing but unholiness will remain." Here it can be noted that the dramatic, relational emphasis and the existential; moment by moment and interrelated teleological goal are combined.

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<sup>215</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part II.I. 17, 283.

<sup>216</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part II.I. 16. 3, 257.

<sup>217</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part II.I. 16. 2, 257.

<sup>218</sup> *APACP*, 417.



## 6. Sin and Holiness

John Taylor of Norwich claimed that holiness was a reality only when a person was conscious of its presence.<sup>219</sup> Wesley countered that holiness was a state which is defined by love: “the love of God and all mankind;” then he added, “And cannot God shed abroad this love in any soul without his concurrence, antecedent to his knowledge or consent?”<sup>220</sup> Holiness then begins with God’s act whether a person is conscious of it or not. In other words, before a person can act in a righteous manner there must be a prior change of disposition or mindset.<sup>221</sup> In this manner Wesley avoided Pelagianism. Wesley then made reference to the Anselmic line of a payment to appease the justice of God. Wesley commented, “I add, and unless it actually be paid him; otherwise that persuasion but increases our condemnation.”<sup>222</sup> Wesley meant that we cannot pay the price because all that we pay is still inadequate for God’s required justice. It is paid through the death of Christ.

In the western theological formulation the question of the continuation of original sin was constructed along two lines, either traducianism or creationism. John Wesley tried, at first, to avoid the debate and then entered into it with a creationist standpoint but he eventually moved in the traducian direction. Tertullian developed a particular form of traducian theology with the explanation that the soul was a refined material substance inherited from Adam.<sup>223</sup> The physical body and the physical soul

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<sup>219</sup> John Wesley quoted John Taylor as stating, “Adam could not be originally created in righteousness and true holiness, because habits of holiness cannot be created without our knowledge, concurrence, or consent. For holiness in its nature implies the choice and consent of a moral agent, without which it cannot be holiness,” *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part II, 292.

<sup>220</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part II, 292.

<sup>221</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part II, 293.

<sup>222</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part II. II, 308.

<sup>223</sup> Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul* V (ANF, Vol. III), 184-185.

were both inherited from the parents and both were corrupt.<sup>224</sup> Augustine, on the other hand, rejected the corporeality of the soul.<sup>225</sup> John Rist commented that, “Augustine was deeply impressed by Platonic claims as to the superiority of the soul to the body, as well as about the immateriality and hence godlikeness of the soul itself.”<sup>226</sup> He went on to add, “in Augustine’s hierarchically ordered universe we expect a hierarchical relationship between them: naturally the higher rules the lower, and indeed the soul is ‘suited to’ ruling the body.”<sup>227</sup> Augustine argued that the corruption of the soul was part of the corruption of Adam that was passed to all humanity, thus it appears that the soul would have been part of the humanness generated by Adam and therefore a corrupted soul came from one’s parents.<sup>228</sup> John Rist, though, is convinced that as long as one held to the corruption of humanity and the immateriality of the soul then Augustine would not have been too concerned whether one held to ‘creationism’ or ‘traducianism.’<sup>229</sup>

Wesley, at first, treated the Augustinian understanding that original sin was passed on through the sexual act of procreation as mystery and thus did not need an explanation. He commented, “Likewise how we are conceived in sin, I know not; but know that we are so conceived.”<sup>230</sup> But this view was later readjusted. Wesley read Henry Woolnor’s *The True Original of the Soule* and in his Journal indicated that this had altered his thinking.<sup>231</sup> Wesley had moved to the traducianist position. The abridgement of Henry Woolner’s work appeared in the *Arminian Magazine* of

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<sup>224</sup> Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul* XXVII, 207-208

<sup>225</sup> Augustine, *On the Soul and Its Origin* II. 7 (NPNF, First Series, Vol. V), 333-334.

<sup>226</sup> John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptised*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 93.

<sup>227</sup> Rist, 101.

<sup>228</sup> *On the Soul and Its Origin* I. 8, 318.

<sup>229</sup> Rist, 318.

<sup>230</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Part III. VII, 336.

<sup>231</sup> 27 January, 1762, *Journal* (BE) 21: 350.

1783.<sup>232</sup> This meant that Wesley supported the idea that only the soul was infected by sin, but, as a result, the body had become corrupted. He appeared to distinguish between corruption and sin. Wesley's assertion was, "Yet is not sin so seated in the soul, as that it should not infect the body also? For though it cannot dwell in the body alone, nor be propagated by it, yet together with the soul the body is infected, and by them both, sin is propagated."<sup>233</sup> Corruption appeared to have a meaning of decay or death and this becomes a way of life. This theological position will bear a highly significant impact on Wesley's understanding of holiness for he has now asserted that the physical is corrupted but not sinful.

This position adopted by Wesley needs further amplification. Wesley would use the word 'corrupt' to describe the physical body. In the sermon *Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels* (1790), 'the treasure' was the full implications of salvation<sup>234</sup> but he then commented, "Just such is the case with a holy Christian. We have the heavenly treasure in earthly, mortal, corruptible bodies."<sup>235</sup> The corruptible body presses down on the soul and the result is "mistakes in judgment will frequently give occasion to mistakes in practice."<sup>236</sup> Almost thirty years earlier Wesley advised a member of the Methodist Society:

you dwell in a poor, shattered house of clay, which presses down the immortal spirit. Hence all your thoughts, words, and actions are so imperfect; so far from coming up to the standard, (that law of love, which, but for the

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<sup>232</sup> See the editorial comments by Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater (BE) 21: 250, and, Kenneth Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 33. Ward and Heitzenrater indicate that Wesley moved from a creationist position to traducianism after reading Henry Woolnor.

<sup>233</sup> "The True Origin of the Soul," *Arminian Magazine* (6) 1783, 493.

<sup>234</sup> *Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels* I. 3 (BE) 4:164.

<sup>235</sup> *Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels* II. 1: 164; see also *The Good Steward* II. 3 (BE) 2: 287 for a similar idea..

<sup>236</sup> *Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels* II. 1: 165.



corruption of the body, your soul would answer in all instances,) that you may well say, till you go to Him you love, -

“Every moment, Lord, I need  
The merit of thy death.”<sup>237</sup>

The physical, in Wesley's theology, is a problem that a person does not overcome no matter how complete salvation is because salvation does not deal with the physical but with the soul or mind. The sermon *The End of Christ's Coming* added a further explanation to the problem of the physical in humanity. Wesley stated that the human corruptible body was to remain during a person's earthly existence in order not to re-create the problem of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they became overly confident in their human ability. The corruptible body recognises that a person is incapable of achieving salvation apart from the sufficiency of God.<sup>238</sup>

There is further amplification on this theme in his 1784 sermon, *On Perfection*.<sup>239</sup> Albert Outler clarified that Wesley had reduced the controversy regarding Christian perfection to two questions: “(1) the definition of ‘perfection’ in terms of a Christian's love of God and neighbour - no less but also no more; and (2) the definition of sin as deliberate.”<sup>240</sup> This had a direct relation to his explanation of the physical body and its place in the experience of Christian perfection. Wesley explained it this way:

Therefore it is not possible for man, whose understanding is darkened, to whom mistake is as natural as ignorance, who cannot think at all but by the mediation of organs which are weakened and depraved, like the other parts of his corruptible body; it is not possible, I say, for men always to think right, to apprehend things distinctly, and to judge truly of them.<sup>241</sup>

This was, for Wesley, the human problem for he stated that angelic perfection was

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<sup>237</sup> Letter to Miss March, April 7, 1763 (Telford IV), 208.

<sup>238</sup> *The End of Christ's Coming* III. 3 (BE) 2: 482.

<sup>239</sup> *On Perfection* (BE) 3: 70-87.

<sup>240</sup> Albert Outler, (BE) 3: 70-71.

<sup>241</sup> *On Perfection* I. 1: 72.

understood in terms of, “they are not liable to mistakes: their knowledge is perfect in its kind.” He then added, “Neither can any man while he is in a corruptible body attain to Adamic perfection.”<sup>242</sup>

At the human level it is impossible to be free from ignorance, error, “and a thousand other infirmities.”<sup>243</sup> He then concluded, “Nor can I be freed from a liableness to such a mistake while I remain in a corruptible body.” Because humanity constantly falls short of God’s law of love Wesley then stated, “Therefore every man living needs the blood of atonement, or he could not stand before God.”<sup>244</sup> Wesley then asked how can a person be capable of perfection while dwelling in a corruptible body? His answer was, “loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind. This is the sum of Christian perfection: it is comprised in one word, love.” He added that the consequence of love of God is love of neighbour.<sup>245</sup> The crucial point is that Christian perfection had a direct relation to the sinful mind and not to the corruptible body. Wesley’s splitting of the mind and body, and, sin and ignorance, always has been a problem within the western interpretation of the extent of holiness within humanity.

Later in the sermon Wesley noted the use of the term ‘body’ when scripture referred to holiness. From I Thessalonians 5:23 he quoted with an inserted comment, “The God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may the whole of you, the spirit, the soul, and the body (this is the literal translation) be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>246</sup> This is followed by a quote from Romans 12:1,

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<sup>242</sup> *On Perfection* I. 2: 72-73.

<sup>243</sup> *On Perfection* I. 3: 73.

<sup>244</sup> *On Perfection* I. 3: 74.

<sup>245</sup> *On Perfection* I. 474.

<sup>246</sup> *On Perfection* I. 9: 75.

“I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies (yourselves, your souls and bodies) - a part of the whole, by a common figure of speech - a living sacrifice unto God.”<sup>247</sup> He then proceeded to explain Christian perfection in language that avoided the use of the word ‘body’, as physical, and instead centred holiness within the ‘mind’. He commented, “If you have truly presented yourselves to God, you offer up to him continually all your thoughts, and words, and actions, through the Son of his love, as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.”<sup>248</sup> For Wesley, the body could be a metaphor for humanity and not simply a particular aspect of being human.

Wesley then arrived at one of the key components of his doctrine of Christian perfection. To those who claimed that salvation could not be from all sin in this life, he countered, “I answer, It will perfectly well consist with salvation from sin, according to the definition of sin (which I apprehend to be the scriptural definition of it): ‘a voluntary transgression of a known law’.”<sup>249</sup> Wesley defended this view with a particular exercise in logic, “For St. John says, ‘All sin is transgression of the law.’ True, but he does not say, ‘All transgression of the law is sin.’ This I deny: let him prove it that can.”<sup>250</sup> By using the definition of sin as a wilful transgression and combining this with the transformation of the mind by the work of God, Wesley could posit the possibility of not sinning.

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<sup>247</sup> *On Perfection* I. 10: 75-76.

<sup>248</sup> *On Perfection* I. 11: 76.

<sup>249</sup> *On Perfection* II. 9: 79; the definition of sin as a voluntary transgression is based in Richard Lucas’, *An Enquiry After Happiness*. Herbert McGonigle stated, “Wesley’s definition is so close to what he read in Lucas that dependence can hardly be doubted, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley’s Evangelical Arminianism*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 150. McGonigle then gave a list of other references used by Wesley implementing the same definition.

<sup>250</sup> *On Perfection* II. 9: 79.



Finally we arrive at the crucial point of the relation of sin and the physical body. The objection had been raised,

But surely we cannot be saved from sin while we dwell in a *sinful body*.<sup>251</sup> A 'sinful body'? I pray, observe how deeply ambiguous, how equivocal, this expression is! But there is no authority for it in scripture: the word 'sinful body' is never found there. And it is totally unscriptural, so it is palpably absurd. For no *body*, or matter of any kind, can be *sinful* - spirits alone are capable of sin. Pray in what part of the body should sin lodge? It cannot lodge in the skin, nor in the muscles, or nerves, or veins, or arteries; it cannot be in the bones any more than in the hair or nails. Only the soul can be the seat of sin.<sup>251</sup>

Wesley clearly rejected the Augustinian styled understanding that human physicalness is permeated with sin. We can make a brief investigation into this through Augustine and John Calvin.

Augustine stated the problem in this manner: "And mark that even when He who is Himself the Truth and the Word, by whom all things were made, had been made flesh that He might dwell among us, the apostle yet says, 'Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.'" Then Augustine added in this same section, "instead of weakly clinging to temporal things, even though these have been put on and worn by Him for our salvation, to pass over them quickly, and to struggle to attain unto Himself, who has freed our nature from the bondage of temporal things, and has set down at the right hand of His Father."<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> *On Perfection* II. 9: 79-80. A brief explanation of Wesley's use of the words 'flesh' (σὰρξ) and 'body' (σῶμα) is appropriate. All these references are in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*. John 1: 14 will serve as a starting point. The passage states that the Word became flesh (σὰρξ). Wesley explained, "*Flesh* sometimes signifies corrupt nature; sometimes, the body; sometimes, as here, the whole man." It is the context that decides the interpretation. In Galatians 5: 17-19 σὰρξ carries the meaning of "evil nature" as an "inward principle". In I Corinthians 15: 38-49 σὰρξ and σῶμα are interchangeable and refer to the physical body which succumbs to death. In Romans 3:20; II Corinthians 7:5; Galatians 2:16 σὰρξ refers to the whole person. The word σῶμα also has a variety of interpretations. In Romans 6:6 and Romans 7:24 the "body (σῶμα) of sin" or "body (σῶμα) of this death" is a reference to the evil nature in humanity. But Wesley, in Romans 6: 12, interpreted body (σῶμα) with the statement, "It must be subject to death, but it need not be subject to sin." This carried the meaning that physicalness was subject to sin but not equivalent to the evil nature.

<sup>252</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* III. 34 (NPNF First Series), 532.

The “temporal things” in these comments is the physical life which Christ dispensed with and we know him no longer in that manner, consequently, Christ will free us from the physical life. The physical, according to Augustine, is bondage.

John Calvin wrote in a similar vein but with variation on this theme. Calvin first explained Augustine and the mortal body and then added his own particular contribution:

Content to designate it with the term “weakness,” he teaches that it becomes sin only when either act or consent follows the conceiving or apprehension of it, that is, when the will yields to the first strong inclination. We, on the other hand, deem it sin when man is tickled by any desire at all against the law of God. Indeed, we label “sin” that very depravity which begets in us desires of this sort. We accordingly teach that in the saints, until they are divested of mortal bodies, there is always sin; for in their flesh there resides that depravity of inordinate desiring which contends against righteousness.<sup>253</sup>

Here we see in both Augustine and Calvin that physicalness is sinful although Calvin takes an even stronger view than Augustine.

One example from the Early Church Fathers gives an indication of a different theological approach to physicalness and holiness. A section from Athanasius', *Life of Antony*, described Antony's physical appearance as amazing to fellow monks. It demonstrated the life of holiness, but he was not only physically stable, he was mentally stable. A brief passage from the hagiography can be cited. This account from Athanasius is important as it takes place after Antony reportedly spent twenty years in solitude:

So he spent nearly twenty years practicing the ascetic life by himself, never going out and but seldom seen by others. After this, as there were many who longed and sought to imitate his holy life and some of his friends came and forcefully broke down the door and removed it, Antony came forth as out of a shrine, as one initiated into sacred mysteries and filled with the spirit of God.

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<sup>253</sup> *Institutes* I. III.10, 602-603.

It was the first time that he showed himself outside the fort to those who came to him. When they saw him, they were astonished to see that his body had kept its former appearance, that it was neither obese from want of exercise, nor emaciated from his fastings and struggles with the demons: he was the same man they had known before his retirement.

Again, the state of his soul was pure, for it was neither contracted by grief, nor dissipated by pleasure nor pervaded by jollity or dejection. He was not embarrassed when he saw the crowds, nor was he elated at seeing so many there to receive him. No, he had himself completely under control - a man guided by reason and stable in his character.<sup>254</sup>

Antony's humanity was described as 'reason' because he was restored in Christ, the Word (reason). Antony's asceticism did not result in mutilation of the body but the restoration of the body and, with this in mind, Athanasius incorporated stories of Antony that included healings, clairvoyance into people's lives, and knowledge of the future. This ability, according to Athanasius, was the work of God in Antony's life. Athanasius also gave an account of an out of body experience. In all of this the physical did not press down upon the mind nor interrupt the spirituality of a person.

In returning to Wesley it is important to recognise two definitions of sin. There is the definition in which sin is a disposition or a mindset. This is prior to any action so it is involuntary sin. Wesley put it this way: "By 'sin' I here understand inward sin: any sinful tempter, passion, or affection; such as pride, self-will, love of the world, in any kind or degree; such as lust, anger, peevishness; any disposition contrary to the mind which was in Christ."<sup>255</sup> But in a discussion on not committing sin Wesley described sin as an outward act, thus, "By 'sin' I here understand outward sin, according to the plain, common acceptation of the word: an actual, voluntary 'transgression of the law'...of any commandment of God acknowledged to be such at

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<sup>254</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 14 (ACW Vol. 10), trans., Robert T. Meyer, (Mahwah, New Jersey: The Paulist Press, 1978), 32.

<sup>255</sup> *On Sin in Believers* II. 2 (BE) 1: 320.



the time that it is transgressed.”<sup>256</sup>

Then there are mistakes that are not directly accountable sins but can possibly develop into accountable sins, though it is not required. This position is developed in five particulars:

- 1) Everyone makes mistakes as long as he lives;
- 2) A mistake in opinion may occasion a mistake in practice;
- 3) Every such mistake is a transgression of the perfect law;
- 4) Every mistake, were it not for the blood of atonement, would expose us to eternal damnation;
- 5) It follows, that the most perfect have continued need for the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions, and may say for themselves as well as for their brethren, ‘Forgive us our trespasses.’<sup>257</sup>

As Wesley also said, “a mistake in judgment may sometimes occasion a mistake in practice, though great care is to be taken that no ill use be made of this concession,”<sup>258</sup>

Yet he also called a mistake a transgression, that is, a sin which needs Christ’s atonement.

In this situation a sequence is set up where a soon to be accountable sin occurs when a person may not be directly conscious of it, yet still sins, involuntarily. It began in the frailty of being human. Technically this appears to be of a different kind than direct disobedience to God. Still, it is sin and Christ’s atonement is operative. Yet where love is the principal response to God and neighbour then voluntary sin is the more serious matter.<sup>259</sup> To further explain Wesley’s position regarding the relation between voluntary sin and physical existence, his letter to Dorothy Furley confirmed his particular position regarding Christian perfection as not dealing directly with the physical corrupt existence. In part, he wrote to her, “I myself believe that such a

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<sup>256</sup> *The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God* II. 2 (BE) 1: 436.

<sup>257</sup> *APACP*, 395; *Conference Minutes*, August 15, 1758 (JWO, 177).

<sup>258</sup> *APACP*, 399.

<sup>259</sup> *APACP*, 395.

perfection is inconsistent with living in a corruptible body; for this makes it impossible 'always to think right.' While we breathe we shall more or less mistake. If, therefore, Christian perfection implies this, we must not expect it till after death."<sup>260</sup>

John Wesley apparently recognised that his position ran contrary to the accepted Reformed theology. Seven years earlier Richard Thompson had written a letter critical of Wesley's description of Christian perfection attainable now. Thompson indicated the problem, "I might go on to ask you farther on this subject, why persons are subject to death, notwithstanding they are (in your opinion) delivered from *all* corruption of human nature, when the reason assigned in Scripture why the body is subject to death is *because of sin*."<sup>261</sup> The key to Thompson's criticism is that since death still occurs then Christian perfection is evidence of the experience not being a reality. The Reformed and Wesleyan divide is clarified here. Thompson indicated in his letter that he expected Wesley not to respond and Wesley offered no response.

The involuntary sins included a list of what Christian perfection did not solve. It did not give a person freedom from lack of knowledge, ignorance, or mistakes; people remained fallible and limited in knowledge; people faced the frailty of human existence and temptation. It is required that people must always improve in these areas.<sup>262</sup> John Wesley concluded, with an interesting and repeated phrase, "To explain myself a little further on this head: (1) Not only sin, properly so called, (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law) but sin, improperly so called, (that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown) needs the atoning

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<sup>260</sup> *To Dorothy Furley*, September 15, 1762 (Telford IV), 188.

<sup>261</sup> *From Richard Thompson*, Aug. 15, 1755 (BE) 26: 580.

<sup>262</sup> *APACP*, 374. This is repeated on p. 383.

blood.”<sup>263</sup> Then he asserted, “*sinless perfection* is a phrase I never use, lest I should be seen to contradict myself.” Thus sinless perfection was impossible due to the involuntary transgression which is still counted as sin. At the same time Wesley’s particular definition of Christian perfection revolved around the understanding of the human mind or soul which he believed could be changed through the work of the Christ and the Holy Spirit. Lindström’s explanation of Wesley’s apparent contradiction in not supporting ‘sinless’ perfection while holding to a position that sin has been removed is stated in this manner:

The apparent contradiction is due to his use of different concepts of perfection and a corresponding duality in the terms law and sin. He employs a concept of relative perfection and a concept of absolute perfection. The former is subjective and concerns the intention and will, the latter objective and independent of man’s potentialities. This duality means that on the one hand he does not regard the defects of the fully sanctified as sins in the proper sense of the word. There can be no sin, he says, where love is the only principle of action. On the other hand these mistakes and defects can also be regarded as sins in the sense that they constitute deviations from the perfect law. Not even such defects as necessarily pertain to man during his life on earth can “bear the rigour of God’s justice.”<sup>264</sup>

What needs added emphasis from Lindström is the problem of the physical aspect of humanity.

For Wesley all Christians, but especially the mature Christians, should recognise that they are under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. This meant that sin is not a requirement of action in the Christian life. He concluded after an explanation of passages from James and I John, “A Christian is so far perfect, as not to commit

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<sup>263</sup> *APACP*, 396; sin as a voluntary transgression, ‘properly so called.’, and, sin is an involuntary transgression, ‘improperly so called’ are definitely contentious. The phrases ‘properly so called’ and ‘improperly so called’ are not references to the existence or non-existence of sin but to which type of sin refers to Christian perfection. ‘Improperly’ carried the connotation of ‘not applying.’ He had already called involuntary sins, sins that needed the atonement of Christ.

<sup>264</sup> Lindström, 150.



sin.”<sup>265</sup> He further explained that sin proceeded from the heart of man and if the heart is cleansed and “no longer evil then evil thoughts no longer proceed out of it.”<sup>266</sup> He proceeded to affirm that Christ is at the centre of the holy life and at this point becomes the example of Christian living. It is Christ who cleanses the mature believer and this can become a present experience. Lindström was correct in explaining the implication of this for Wesley, “By this he meant that man was also delivered from original sin.”<sup>267</sup> This included more than a cleansing of guilt from sin in justification by faith, it affirmed cleansing following justification. As expected there was a great deal of controversy over this point. John Wesley did accept, though did not require, a theological system that favoured a form of two works of grace. The first work involved the justification of the sinner, the second work dealt with cleansing from sin. The difference was in levels of spirituality but they were consistently understood as the work of God for and in humanity. It was not by human ability. This distinction is important in John Wesley. Interestingly, Wesley had showed some ambivalence to the idea of sin removed from a person’s life. In a 1763 letter he stated, “And whether sin is *suspended* or *extinguished* I will not dispute: it is enough that they feel nothing but love.”<sup>268</sup> A few years later he had altered his opinion and stated, “I use the word ‘destroyed’ because Paul does: ‘suspended’ I cannot find in my Bible.”<sup>269</sup>

From the *Preface of the Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742) Wesley used this definition to describe the perfect Christian. It can be noted that his lengthy definition was a collection of scripture quotations:

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<sup>265</sup> APACP, 376.

<sup>266</sup> APACP, 377.

<sup>267</sup> Lindström, 144.

<sup>268</sup> To Mrs. Maitland, May 12, 1763 (Telford IV, 213).

<sup>269</sup> To Joseph Benson, October 5, 1770 (Telford V, 204).

But what then, it may be asked, do you mean by *one that is perfect*, or, *one that is like his Master*? We mean, one in whom is *the mind which was in Christ*, and who *so walketh as He walked*; a man that *hath clean hands and a pure heart*; or that is *cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*; one in whom *there is no occasion of stumbling*, and who, accordingly, *doth not commit sin*. To declare this a little more particularly: we understand by that scriptural expression, *a perfect man*, one in whom God hath fulfilled His faithful word, *From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. I will save you from all your uncleannesses*. We understand hereby, one whom God hath sanctified throughout, even *in body, soul, and spirit*; in whom *is no darkness at all*; the blood of Jesus Christ His Son having *cleansed him from all sin*.<sup>270</sup>

In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* this was developed to include, “They are freed from evil thoughts, so that they cannot enter into them, no, not for a moment. Aforetime, when an evil thought came in, they looked up, and it vanished away. But now it does not come in, there being no room for this, in a soul which is full of God.”<sup>271</sup> Wesley regarded temptations as not sins since Christ’s temptations were real and Christ was sinless.<sup>272</sup>

Later Wesley will be confronted by the challenging question, if two entirely sanctified Christians have children, how can original sin be inherited from those cleansed from original sin? Are the children born free from sin? His answer appears to be hesitatingly worded, “It is a possible, but not a probable, case; I doubt whether it ever was or ever will be.” He then answered with more confidence, “But waving this, I answer, Sin is entailed upon me, not by immediate generation, but by my first parent. ‘In Adam all died; by the disobedience of one, all men were made sinners;’ all men, without exception, who were in his loins when he ate the forbidden fruit.”<sup>273</sup> Here he turned immediately to the concept of Adam as the federal head and sin was

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<sup>270</sup> PW II, 47.

<sup>271</sup> APACP, 379.

<sup>272</sup> APACP, 419.

<sup>273</sup> APACP, 400.

directly a problem of Adamic life, that is, he incorporated the representative model that we are all in Adam and thus from birth are infected by sin.

These questions came out of the Bristol Conference of 1758. But they had been raised three years earlier by Richard Thompson.<sup>274</sup> Thompson's question concerned people who were, according to Wesley, "*absolutely free from the corruption of human nature.*" This language was Thompson's but implying that it was John Wesley's position. Thompson then concluded that such parents would not convey corruption to their children, and if this was so, then the children have no need of a Saviour. Wesley's answer then was completely inadequate as Thompson later recognised. Wesley stated, "As to Christian perfection, I believe two who were made perfect in love never did, nor will, marry together."<sup>275</sup>

Wesley was very clear that he did not hesitate to talk about cleansing from all sin, original and committed sins. The document *The Doctrine of Original Sin* stated it in a weaker sense, it was redemption from "all sin, both original and actual,"<sup>276</sup> but in his sermon *Christian Perfection* he included cleansing in clear and unequivocal language. After working through several scriptural texts he clarified, "It remains then, that Christians are saved in this world from all sin, from all unrighteousness; that they are now in such a sense perfect as not to commit sin, and to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers."<sup>277</sup> Albert Outler's editorial comment is important. "Taken literally this flew in the face of obvious experience and of Wesley's own previous

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<sup>274</sup> Letter from Richard Thompson, July 10, 1755 (BE) 26: 571.

<sup>275</sup> Letter to Richard Thompson, July 25, 1755 (BE) 26: 575. Wesley's answer may raise questions about his attitude towards marriage but that is another topic.

<sup>276</sup> *The Doctrine of Original Sin According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience* (Jackson IX), 312.

<sup>277</sup> *Christian Perfection* II. 8 (BE) 2:120.



qualifications. And, of course, it was taken literally, thus provoking easy misinterpretations which could not be easily refuted. Wesley was more willing to qualify such overstatements than to acknowledge them as such, or to seem to contradict himself."<sup>278</sup> Outler then added that sermons such as *Wandering Thoughts*, *On Sin in Believers*, and *The Repentance of Believers* served as the qualifiers to his previous statements on not committing sin.

There is the added complication revealed in his letter to Mrs. Barton. In this communication on spiritual guidance he stated, "...although many taste of that heavenly gift, deliverance from inbred sin, yet so few, so exceedingly few, retain it one year, hardly one in ten, nay one in thirty."<sup>279</sup> But Wesley then suggested that it was possible to retain perfection but evidently it was an exception, not a normal pattern.

Wesley was always concerned to avoid describing perfection in what he considered to be unrealistic manners. He always eliminated human infirmities from all his accounts of the experience. He did maintain that they were sins but they were not conscious sins. As the Anglican priest stated, "it cannot bear the rigour of God's justice but needs the atoning blood."<sup>280</sup> He then drew a distinction between deliberate conscious sins from which a person is responsible and non-deliberate and unconscious sins for which a person could not be held accountable. But confession of sin was always applicable to all Christians in whatever state of life they lived.

W.E. Sangster drew a parallel between Wesley and that of F.R. Tennant.

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<sup>278</sup> *Wandering Thoughts* (BE) 2:125

<sup>279</sup> *To Mrs. Barton*, Mar. 15, 1779 (Telford V, 185).

<sup>280</sup> *APACP*, 395. The subject became a constant topic for Wesley.

Tennant's work on sin, at the turn of the twentieth century, rejected the Augustinian idea of original sin and moved to an evolutionary understanding that sin developed in a person's life.<sup>281</sup> Tennant's work moved humanity from a collective understanding of sin to a more individualist emphasis. Sin is then a conscious act, it is not a consequence of a perverted nature.<sup>282</sup> Tennant's emphasis on sin as a conscious act and Wesley's emphasis on sin as a voluntary act were similar but apart from that Sangster found no other similarities between the two theologians. Still Sangster concluded, "Wesley nowhere uses the term 'unconscious' but, when discussing perfection his definition requires him to reject it as heartily as did Dr. Tennant."<sup>283</sup> According to Sangster, R. Newton Flew quite stringently accused Wesley of missing the point of unconscious sins. Flew added the critique, "Our worst sins are often those of which we are unconscious. The stress on the conscious and deliberate intention of the agent is the most formidable defect in Wesley's doctrine of the ideal."<sup>284</sup> This is an important critique although it is possible to read Wesley as not as opposed to 'unconscious' sin as appears in the Sangster and Flew analysis. This is possible when it is recognised that Wesley did believe that humanity, apart from any conscious sin, needed the atonement of Christ and such sin of being human could develop into voluntary or conscious sin. Admittedly, it certainly is not stressed in Wesley's explanation; in fact, he seemed to be cautious about asserting it too strongly. Thus the comments from Sangster and Flew have justification but with certain reservation.

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<sup>281</sup> F.R. Tennant, *The Origin and Propagation of Sin*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908). Throughout the book Tennant rejected the traditional explanation of original sin but see especially p. 101-102.

<sup>282</sup> F.R. Tennant, 97, 114.

<sup>283</sup> W.E. Sangster, *The Path to Perfection: An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection*, (London: The Epworth Press, 1943), 72.

<sup>284</sup> R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 333.

Even the fully sanctified need Christ's atonement. John Wesley constantly asserted this. The reason was that no one could hold up to the objective perfect will of God. Two interpreters have missed the point that Wesley made regarding involuntary sins. Howard Slaatte commented, "The Christian must repent of volitional sin and seek grace afresh, in fact, he can hardly repent of anything of which he is unaware."<sup>285</sup> George A. Turner likewise made the comment, "Wesley insisted that the third type of 'sin' (sins of ignorance) were not sins, but he said inconsistently that these also need repentance and forgiveness."<sup>286</sup> Wesley did call sins of ignorance, sins, and they needed Christ's atonement. Importantly for Wesley original sin did not condemn humanity. He wrote, "That this is imputed to all men, I allow; yea, that by reason hereof 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.' But that any will be damned for this alone, I allow not, till you show me where it is written. Bring me proof from Scripture, and I submit; but till then I utterly deny it."<sup>287</sup>

The consequence of this for the person living in a mature Christian experience is that the Prophetic work of Christ, as teacher, as imparting wisdom to the Christian, and his mediation is always necessary. The entirely sanctified are more conscious of this than others.<sup>288</sup> All of life in whatever state a person lives is in need of God's grace. Apart from God's grace a Christian will wither. Wesley drew this conclusion:

The best of men still need Christ in his priestly office, to atone for their omissions, their shortcomings, (as some not improperly speak,) their mistake in judgment and practice, and their defects of various kinds. For these are all deviations from the perfect law, and consequently need an atonement. Yet that they are not properly sins, we apprehend may appear from the words of St.

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<sup>285</sup> Howard Slaatte, *Fire in the Brand: An Introduction to the Creative Work and Theology of John Wesley*, (London: University Press of America, 1983), 120.

<sup>286</sup> George A. Turner, *The More Excellent Way: The Scriptural Basis of the Wesleyan Message*, (Winona Lake, Indiana: Light and Life Press, 1952), 238.

<sup>287</sup> *Predestination Calmly Considered* 34 (Jackson X), 223.

<sup>288</sup> *APACP*, 395.



Paul, 'He that loveth, hath fulfilled the law; for love is the fulfilling of the law.' (Rom. xiii. 10). Now, mistakes, and whatever infirmities necessarily flow from the corruptible state of the body, are noway contrary to love; nor therefore, in the Scripture sense, sin.<sup>289</sup>

### 7. Instantaneous and Gradual Holiness

In 1745 the Methodist Conference clarified and affirmed statements on sanctification; sanctification began after justification and then a believer began to die to sin and grow in grace; it was a present continual experience.<sup>290</sup> The fourth Conference (1747) affirmed a distinction between the words sanctification, which pertained to all the justified, and the entire sanctification, which referred to believers who were saved from all sin.<sup>291</sup>

John Wesley was not confident that the holiness he described could be received all at once. He believed that an instantaneous work had begun but it was also gradual. He insisted that the testimony of witnesses was important and there was no testimony of a person receiving what Wesley described as "remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, a clean heart" all at once;<sup>292</sup> it definitely involved a process begun in time. Initial sanctification was understood as the common experience of all and constituted the mixture of purity and sin. Entire sanctification was not a new sanctification, it was the continuation of the previous sanctification; the difference was of degrees.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> APACP, 396.

<sup>290</sup> JWO, 152.

<sup>291</sup> JWO, 167-168.

<sup>292</sup> APACP, 380; Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*, 257, stated that instantaneous perfection was first asserted in 1765 in the sermon, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (BE) 2: 168.

<sup>293</sup> *On Patience* proem 10 (BE) 3: 174-175. Albert Outler believed this to be a post-1783 sermon, (BE) 3: 169.

Wesley outlined what he believed to be the common experience a person goes through from the stage of being an unbeliever to full salvation. Importantly this experience is all the result of the work of God. It began in prevenient grace which created a repentance prior to justification. Then there was a second repentance at justification which also included sanctification followed by entire sanctification.<sup>294</sup>

This Wesley contended was his constant teaching. As Harald Lindström explained:

“Whereas gradual sanctification was due to God’s grace and man’s obedience to it, instantaneous sanctification was considered exclusively God’s own work.”<sup>295</sup> The

instantaneous never involved human co-operation. Yet the instantaneous was never accomplished in isolation from the gradual growth. Again Lindström stated, “Man could not expect entire sanctification unless he had already undergone the previous gradual work of sanctification.”

The *Minutes* from the 1758 Conference in Bristol explained this further. The question was, “Is this death to sin, and renewal in love, gradual or instantaneous?”

The answer was stated in comparison to physical death:

A man may be dying for some time, yet he does not, properly speaking, die, till the instant the soul is separated from the body, and in that instant he lives the life of eternity. In like manner, he may be dying to sin for some time; yet he is not dead to sin, till sin is separated from the soul; and in that instant he lives the full life of love. And as the change undergone, when the body dies, is of a different kind, and infinitely greater than we had known before, yea, such as till then it is impossible to conceive; so the change wrought, when the soul dies to sin, is of a different kind, and infinitely greater than any before, and than any can conceive till he experiences it. Yet he still grows in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, in the love and image of God, and will do so, not only till death, but to all eternity.<sup>296</sup>

The *Minutes* continued to repeat the explanation of the importance of growth prior to

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<sup>294</sup> *APACP*, 380-381.

<sup>295</sup> Lindström, 134.

<sup>296</sup> *APACP*, 402.

the instantaneous death to sin and then growth after death to sin. There were appropriate spiritual disciplines which were to be implemented in the process in order to move into instantaneous death to sin yet pastoral concerns were expressed over the over-examination of those who profess entire sanctification and also for those who claim entire sanctification but do not actually experience it.<sup>297</sup>

In 1764 he reviewed many of his thoughts on the Christian life and wrote them down in brief propositions. Though there was a distinct preference for asserting instantaneous sanctification, Wesley believed it should not be demanded of people. In part, he reached this conclusion, “‘But in some the change is not instantaneous.’ They did not perceive the instant when it was wrought. It is often difficult to perceive the instant when a man dies; yet there is an instant in which life ceases. And if ever sin ceases, there must be a last moment of its existence, and a first moment of our deliverance from it.”<sup>298</sup> The parallel between physical death and death to sin is brought out in this analysis so that even if it is not perceived, instantaneous death to sin is real.

Yet Wesley insisted near the end of his life that whether such entire holiness was instantaneous or gradual, the scriptures were silent on the subject<sup>299</sup> and so it was required to turn to the experience and testimony of people. He concluded, “I cannot but believe that sanctification is commonly, if not always, an *instantaneous* work.”<sup>300</sup> But Wesley never wavered from the idea that growth occurred before the

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<sup>297</sup> *APACP*, 403-404.

<sup>298</sup> *APACP*, 442.

<sup>299</sup> *On Patience* proem 11: 177.

<sup>300</sup> *On Patience* proem 12: 178.



instantaneous experience and after.<sup>301</sup> The sermon, *Christian Perfection*, asserted that God's grace could never be exhausted, nor could knowledge or love or growth ever end. So this type of salvation was not future only but could be a present experience.<sup>302</sup>

We should make an important and highly significant point in the discussion of the Western and Eastern theological influence on John Wesley. He believed that he used scripture as the primary and dominant source but still the question remains as to the theological model he preferred in scriptural interpretation. His secondary sources came from an array of Early Church Fathers, Roman Catholics, and Protestants in their various forms, and his reading was exhaustive. The Eastern tradition was used to fill in areas where he found the tradition convenient to defend his biblical and western theological understanding.<sup>303</sup>

## 8. Holiness and Experience

Experience was crucial to John Wesley's theology. A theology that lacked an experiential dimension was not worth discussing and the whole of the eighteenth century Methodist revival was grounded on this perspective. At the beginning of his study of John Wesley's experiential theology, Gregory Clapper stated, "...Wesley's affection laden language is not a pandering to the masses but is in fact the most true

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<sup>301</sup> In a remarkable letter to his brother Charles there is a comment which differentiates the emphasis between the two brothers. "Go on, in your *own way*, in what God has peculiarly called you to. Press the *instantaneous* blessing. Then I shall have more time for my peculiar calling, enforcing the *gradual* work," (JWO, 82). The letter was sent to Charles on June 27, 1766 and expresses, as Outler points out, a rare moment of emotional despair as John Wesley faces the struggle of the revival and a less than happy marriage.

<sup>302</sup> *APACP*, 383.

<sup>303</sup> Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 106: "Wesley, then, had a spectrum of uses of Christian antiquity, ranging from those in which conceptions of Christian antiquity were called upon to confirm certain aspects of the Methodist program, to those in which conception of Christian antiquity served as intentional patterns for Methodist beliefs and practices."

and adequate way to talk about Christianity. This language is, therefore, a direct expression of his theological (not merely rhetorical) grasp of the Christian faith.”<sup>304</sup>

Heart religion was one of the most important aspects of Wesley’s theology and while he incessantly promoted it, he was also critical of some aspects of claims to experience.

A further clarification is now needed. Wesley described Christian experience in relation to Christ, yet, Wesley believed, there had been an Adamic and Mosaic model of experience. Wesley described each model by the word ‘law’ and in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*<sup>305</sup> he believed that these three distinct models could be identified by the relation of the Law to perfection according to scripture:

1. The Adamic Law - this is pre-Fall in which humanity was perfect in mind. His body was not a hindrance to the mental perfection; “he should always think, always speak, and always act precisely right, in every point whatever.” Wesley called this the “law of works.”
2. The Mosaic Law - After the Fall humanity is corrupted and the body is a hindrance to the mind. It is impossible to reason correctly. Here again we can note that the physical is affected by the Fall. Wesley commented, “no man is able to perform the service which the Adamic law requires.”
3. In Christ there is the law of faith, “but everyone that believeth, now receiveth righteousness, in the full sense of the word; that is, he is justified, sanctified, and glorified.”

The law of faith is fulfilled by love which has replaced the Adamic or angelic

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<sup>304</sup> Gregory Clapper, *John Wesley On Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology*, (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>305</sup> *APACP*, 414-415.

perfection and the Mosaic law.

It does not take long before a study in John Wesley's theological thought recognises that one of the important issues is experience, particularly within the third category. This meant that the Methodist Conferences dealt with specific questions regarding identifying people who had claimed to have the experience of entire sanctification. The 1747 Conference concluded that it was not wise to list people's names and then set people up and allow others to try and destroy their testimony, or, to allow 'idolizing them'.<sup>306</sup> But this was only one problem.

Thomas Maxfield was one of John Wesley's first lay preachers from Bristol but eventually Maxfield began to preach and teach a perfectionism that Wesley termed 'angelic.' The experience that Maxfield had adopted was identified by Wesley in his letter of November 2, 1762. Two excerpts from the letter indicate the problem:

But I dislike your supposing man may be as perfect as an angel; that he can be absolutely perfect; that he can be infallible; or above being tempted; or that the moment he is pure in heart he cannot fall from it.

...

I dislike your directly or indirectly depreciating justification, saying a justified person is not in Christ, is not born of God, is not a new creature, has not a new heart, is not sanctified, not a temple of the Holy Ghost, or that he cannot please God or cannot grow in grace.<sup>307</sup>

Wesley subsequently accused Maxfield of pride by overvaluing himself at the expense of others. Wesley also stated in this type of holiness human imagination is equated with the voice of the Holy Spirit. Maxfield was an example of the type of holiness typified by *perfectus* while Wesley advocated holiness in the language of *teleiotos*. Lindström explained it in this manner: "Thus the perfection which is now attainable is

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<sup>306</sup> *JWO*, 170.

<sup>307</sup> Letter to Thomas Maxfield, Nov. 2, 1762 (Telford IV, 192).



neither angelic perfection nor the kind that Adam possessed before the Fall. It is instead a perfection achieved through faith, a perfection which means perfect love.”<sup>308</sup> By 1771 Wesley refined his explanation of Christian perfection by calling it, “love expelling sin.”<sup>309</sup> Adamic, or angelic, perfection is of a different kind, it was not a matter of degrees as in the *teleiotos* pattern.

Additional problems were encountered and questions were constantly asked on the experiential evidence of an entirely sanctified life and whether a person can actually know of the experience regarding holy living. John Wesley was an experiential theologian but he believed that the Christian life is not grounded in experience. It was grounded in God and the revelation of God. It is possible that a person may claim an experience when it is not true. He composed a response to the problem of experience:

When, after having been fully convinced of inbred sin by a far deeper and clearer conviction than he experienced before justification, and having experienced a gradual mortification of it, he experiences a total death to sin, and an entire renewal in the love and image of God, so as to rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks. Not that to ‘feel all love and no sin’ is a sufficient proof. Several have experienced this for a time, before their souls were fully renewed. None therefore ought to believe that the work is done, till there is added the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing his entire sanctification, as clearly as his justification.<sup>310</sup>

Here it is possible to note the connection of experience to Pneumatology. It is God at work that is primary before any acceptance of human testimony. In a separate statement Wesley added, “I do not build any doctrine on this or that person.”<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Lindström, 147.

<sup>309</sup> *To Walter Churchey*, February 21, 1771 (Telford V, 223): “Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love - love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life of the child of God.”

<sup>310</sup> *APACP*, 401-402.

<sup>311</sup> *APACP*, 405.

John Wesley also recognised the problem of counterfeit claims and the 1758 Conference *Minutes* worked on this particular problem. First there was the caution about making assessments on other people:

What self-sufficiency is this, to set ourselves up for inquisitors-general, for peremptory judges in these deep things of God! Are we qualified for the office? Can we pronounce, in all cases, how far infirmity reaches? What may, and what may not, be resolved into it? What may in all circumstances, and what may not, consist with perfect love? Can we precisely determine, how it will influence the look, the gesture, the tone of voice? If we can, doubtless we are 'the men, and wisdom shall die with us.'<sup>312</sup>

For those who have been mistaken in their testimony, Wesley and the Methodist Conference were expected to grieve, rather than rejoice in being right in their assessment of a person.<sup>313</sup>

Wesley then gave an account of the problems experienced in London in 1762. According to Wesley's account 'pride and enthusiasm' had become evident among certain people. Wesley gave a list of extravagant claims. People confused their imaginations with God, some believed they would never die, others believed they could never be tempted or feel no pain, some believed that they had gifts of prophecy and discerning of spirits.<sup>314</sup> To the contrary, Wesley then included the lengthy testimony of the genuine holy experiential life of Jane Cooper which included the story of her death;<sup>315</sup> this was, according to Wesley, a legitimate testimony and example of perfect love.

Wesley's experiential theology meant that the sanctified person living a life of Christian perfection may fall from that experience, and even out of the whole of the

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<sup>312</sup> *APACP*, 404.

<sup>313</sup> *APACP*, 405.

<sup>314</sup> *APACP*, 406.

<sup>315</sup> *APACP*, 410-414.

Christian life;<sup>316</sup> human co-operation is recognised on the basis that God is already at work; but growth forward may also mean, in this relational system, a backward decrease. The relational concept of constant renewal is thus to be emphasised since this was not a static rigid system. This position had not always been part of Wesley's thought.<sup>317</sup> But even for those who may have fallen away, restoration was always possible.<sup>318</sup>

#### D. Conclusion

The discussion on the work of Christ in the life of the believer permeated Wesley's theology. His major writings were influenced by an unending attempt to clarify his position and answer the critics he faced. For Wesley the Prophetic office of Christ was objective in the sense that it referred first to the Law and the teachings of Christ as promise to humanity; such promises were independent from human experience, yet to be fulfilled in human experience. So the Prophetic office of Christ was also subjective in the sense that the human mind was to conform to the mind of Christ. As a result, there had to be an inner work within the person. It was related to subjective transformation and consequently the prophetic work was always subsequent to the priestly work of Christ.

Justification was understood as instantaneous, as within Reformation Protestant theology, and separate from experience. There was never growth in justification, instead growth was the work of God called sanctification. Here there was

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<sup>316</sup> APACP, 422: "They who are sanctified, yet may fall and perish."

<sup>317</sup> The 'Preface' to the 1740 *Hymns and Sacred Poems* 7 contained repeated assurances of not falling away, *PW*, Vol. 1: 199-201.

<sup>318</sup> APACP, 427-430.



a general, but not full, dependence on John Calvin's mortification and vivification theology of sanctification. Both justification and sanctification were instantaneous begun at the same moment in time.

The later career of the former Oxford don proclaimed original sin in the Augustinian terms of traducianism and though only the soul, or mind, was sinful, the result was a corrupt body which constantly hindered the renewed mind. In order to resolve the problem of entire sanctification and the sinfulness of humanity, Wesley assigned Christian perfection to include the mind but not to the physical. He could thus refer to voluntary sins of the mind and involuntary sins which also pertained to the mind inhibited by the mortality of the physical life. But cleansing from accountable sin only referred to the act of the will. Inevitably this theological distinction would run counter to the accepted Reformed tradition and Wesley was subjected to probing questions from that tradition. Christian perfection did involve Wesley in experiential questions and he was definitely not uncritical of claims of Christian perfection but neither did he press the issue too far, for a too strict accounting, he believed, led to arrogance. We can now examine the third office of Christ as it relates to Wesley's understanding of salvation, the office of Christ as King. The ultimate goal for the Christian was full salvation begun in this earthly life but completed in the heavenly life.

## IV. Christ and the Office of King

### A. Introduction

It becomes apparent in John Wesley's theology that the spiritual life is a continuous process of development; spirituality can move forward or backward. For the 'true' Christian it is a process of restoration to the image of God which is sanctification. But it begins in justification; concomitant with justification is sanctification. From the moment of justification life continues its process by way of faith expressed in love. Faith that does not begin the experience of love to God and neighbour is not genuine faith. Wesley's theological intention demonstrated that as one grows in grace there is no longer fear of death, there is also no fear of God. To fall from the experience of faith was evidence of the failure to grow. It would follow, according to Wesley's theological system, that though it is possible to fall from grace, it is also hardly conceivable. But the possibility always remained. Life was not static but dynamic and though it should lead to positive spiritual maturity in Christ the opposite was nevertheless not discounted. It is possible to understand the importance of the Christian community from this perspective. Christian accountability was at the forefront of ecclesiology. But even here the community relationships were grounded in God's grace. Community could be formulated on no other basis. In this light even those who had not experienced full salvation, as Wesley construed it, need not live in anxiety and despair. This can be summarised in a quote from the sermon, *Satan's*

#### *Devices:*

And if you thus 'taste of the good word, and of the powers of the world to come', you will not murmur against God, because you are not yet 'meet for the inheritance of the saints in light'. Instead of repining at your not being wholly delivered, you will praise God for thus far delivering you. You will magnify

God for what he hath done, and take it as earnest of what he will do. You will not fret against him because you are not yet renewed but bless him because you shall be; and because 'now is your salvation' from all sin 'nearer than when you' first 'believed'. Instead of uselessly tormenting yourself because the time is not fully come you will calmly and quietly wait for it, knowing that it 'will come and will not tarry'.<sup>1</sup>

Salvation, by its very nature, compels a person forward in hope and expectation.

Wesley rejected two of Calvinism's propositions; perseverance of the saints and irresistible grace. For him this reduced God to being the author of evil and, for humanity, it meant the loss of human freedom. In the Bristol Conference of 1744 Question 11 asked: "Are works necessary to the continuance of faith?" The answer was: "Without doubt, for a man may forfeit the gift of God either by sins of omission or commission." Question 12 then asked: "Can faith be lost but for want of works?" The response was: "It cannot but through disobedience."<sup>2</sup> This is repeated in a different context but with a similar emphasis in *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*. Wesley described the purpose of the Methodist bands and he commented:

And yet while most of those who were thus intimately joined together went on daily from faith to faith, some fell from the faith, either all at once, by falling into known, wilful sin, or gradually and almost insensibly, by giving way in what they called little things - by sins of omission, by yielding to heart sins, or by not watching unto prayer. The exhortations and prayers used among the believers did no longer profit these. They wanted advice and instructions suited to their case; which as soon as I observed, I separated them from the rest, and desired them to meet me apart on Saturday evenings.<sup>3</sup>

One discovers Wesley's pastoral concern for people slipping backward in the spiritual life.

Since John Wesley insisted on the requirement of human conscious participation and co-operation in salvation it was possible to presume that his

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<sup>1</sup> *Satan's Devices* II. 5 (BE) 2: 150.

<sup>2</sup> JWO, 138.

<sup>3</sup> *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists* VI. 1 (BE) 9: 268-269.



theology lent itself to Pelagianism. Harald Lindström made an important distinction between the human condition and human merit in Wesley's theology. He stated,

A closer examination of this dependence will now show that Wesley makes a distinction between 'condition' and 'merit'. Here sanctity is regarded as a condition of final salvation, but not as a merit on the strength of which final salvation or justification is accorded to men. This idea of merit is totally rejected with regard to present justification, nor is it allowed to intrude upon the concept of final justification. In the latter as in the former case, Christ is declared the only meritorious cause of human salvation.<sup>4</sup>

With this interpretation of Wesley's understanding of human works, Lindström made it clear that human works were only a result of God's grace and not of human merit.

God's grace did produce an inner transformation which inevitably resulted in a human response in life. The final victory of Christ, then, was conceived to be available to humanity. Its foretaste was a part of present experience but more was to be received at the final judgement.

### 1. Christ as King in Relation to Christ as Priest and Prophet

In the description of the office of Christ as King it will be important to know how John Wesley related the victory motif with the priestly and prophetic offices and then to recognise how the victory theme was understood within the trinitarian relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. John Wesley defined the office of King at work in conjunction with Christ's atonement with the words, "We find also within us a strange misrule of appetites and passions. For these we want Christ in his royal character, to reign in our hearts, and subdue all things to himself."<sup>5</sup> This appears to make the Kingly role directed related to holy living and it is possible to bring the

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<sup>4</sup> Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation*, reprint, (Wilmore, Kentucky: Francis Asbury Press, 1946, 1980), 210.

<sup>5</sup> ENNT: Matt. 1:16.

discussion on sanctification into this section. But Wesley placed a great deal of emphasis on Christ as King and Judge and less emphasis on how this creates a holy person, so Christ reigns in the heart of the already sanctified. Wesley did not create strict division of the roles of salvation created by Christ but the tendency is to state that Christ as King reigns in the hearts of the saints.

He further described the work of Christ in three areas of social life including social systems and responsibilities. First, there was the giving of the Law. Secondly, there was the restoration to the image of God and this implied the love of neighbour; thirdly, the kingly office was incorporated around the experience of love that was a present and future reality in the reign of Christ.<sup>6</sup> In the sermon *The Law Established Through Faith, II* Wesley emphasised the final victory of God which would be defined by love which preceded faith and remained after faith was no longer applicable:

God hath given this honour to love alone. Love is the end of all the commandments of God. Love is the end, the sole end, of every dispensation of God, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things. And it will endure when heaven and earth flee away; for 'love' alone 'never faileth'.<sup>7</sup>

A repeated theme in Wesley's theology of the atonement was the assertion that humanity was incapable of achieving salvation. In the introductory comments to the sermon *The End of Christ's Coming* humanity is capable of seeing the problem of vice and sin but incapable of correcting the problem. The response to sin was therefore a Christologically proposed solution: "Thus it is, by manifesting himself, he destroys the works of the devil, restoring the guilty outcast from God to his favour, to

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<sup>6</sup> *The Law Established Through Faith, II* I. 6 (BE) 2: 38; for the emphasis on the restoration theme see also *The End of Christ's Coming* 5 (BE) 2: 482-483.

<sup>7</sup> *The Law Established Through Faith, II* II. 1: 38.

pardon and peace; the sinner in whom dwelleth no good thing, to love and holiness; the burdened, miserable sinner, to joy unspeakable, to real, substantial happiness.”<sup>8</sup>

The revelation of Christ is the source of victory for humanity.

## B. Christ as King and the Kingdom of God

Two major texts of scripture are helpful in making a start in understanding how Wesley explained the office of King. The texts are Ephesians 1: 21 and Revelation 1: 5. Wesley’s interpretation of Ephesians 1: 21 stated:

*Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion - That is, God hath invested him with uncontrollable authority over all demons in hell, all angels in heaven, and all the princes and potentates on earth. And every name that is named - We know the king is above all, though we cannot name all the officers of his court. So we know that Christ is above all, though we are not able to name all his subjects. Not only in this world, but also in that which is to come - The world to come is so styled, not because it does not yet exist, but because it is not yet visible. Principalities and powers are named now; but those also who are not even named in this world, but shall be revealed in the world to come, are all subject to Christ.*<sup>9</sup>

A few notations can be made. The relationship between the Father and Son is identified. The Father gives the Son all authority both in heaven, on earth, and in hell, thus, Christ is supreme over all creation. There is still to be revealed the full extent of those who are co-operating in Christ’s victory in the present and future reign. This means that there is more to be revealed in the future since all is not yet visible. There is a direct eschatology in this text of scripture though it is not developed here.

The second text is from Revelation 1: 5:

*And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth -* Three glorious appellations are here

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<sup>8</sup> *The End of Christ’s Coming* III. 2 (BE) 2: 481.

<sup>9</sup> ENNT: Eph. 1: 21



given him, and in their proper order. He was *the faithful witness* of the whole will of God before his death, and in death and remains such in glory. He rose from the dead, as "the first-fruits of them that slept;" and now hath all power both in heaven and earth. He is here styled *a prince*: But by and by he bears the title of *king*; yea, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." The phrase, *the kings of the earth*, signifies their power and multitude, and also the nature of their kingdom. It became the Divine Majesty to call them kings with a limitation; especially in this manifesto from his heavenly kingdom, for no creature, much less a sinful man, can bear the title of king in an absolute sense before the eyes of God.<sup>10</sup>

The prophetic work is admitted as occurring prior to his death which is the priestly work. The prophetic remains effective and as King, here Wesley used the word, 'glory,' to signify kingship, the work of Christ also continues. When the three offices are combined Christ is revealed as having all authority and power over creation. The kingly office is the culmination of the work of Christ.

John Deschner commented on Wesley's thought regarding the kingdom of God which plays an important part of the office of King:

At first glance, Wesley's use of the term 'kingdom' seems to have a remarkable looseness of meaning. It can mean sometimes eternal glory, sometimes inward religion, sometimes the gospel dispensation, and likewise a person or thing relating to any of these. Thus 'kingdom' can also mean Christ preaching the gospel, or the gospel itself, or the 'candidates' of the kingdom, or the 'king of heaven, Christ' (Mt. 13: 24; 21: 43; 25: 1, 14).<sup>11</sup>

But then he added that a doctrinal pattern or a more systematic approach does become evident. Within the pattern there is a consistency based on Matthew 3:2.

In Matthew 3:2 Jesus preaches the kingdom of heaven which is equated with the kingdom of God. This is not a future kingdom only, or a future "happy state," but a kingdom that is enjoyed on earth; the kingdom requires a re-orientation of life in present experience. Persons and social systems are called to seek an application and

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<sup>10</sup> ENNT: Rev. 1:5.

<sup>11</sup> John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation*, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960), 127.

the present application continues into the future “with God in glory.” The kingdom includes the earthly life and has implications for the life in glory, or the heavenly life.<sup>12</sup>

Deschner then aligned the two kingdom theology of grace and glory to the seventeenth century Reformed theology.<sup>13</sup> In Heinrich Heppe’s work on Reformed theology he quoted from Johannes Marceius, a seventeenth century theologian, “The kingly dignity in Christ is twofold, the natural which belongs to him as God, the second, the economic, which is his as the Θεανθρωπος.” Heppe had used the terms grace and glory from Marceius to further elucidate the Reformed concept of the full kingdom of God. Grace and glory are the two terms that Wesley used to denote the character of the two kingdoms. Grace was the present kingdom and glory was the future kingdom.

Wesley did not follow Luther’s two kingdom theology,<sup>14</sup> rather he supported the basic tenets of the two kingdom theology in the Reformed tradition. The kingdom of grace is the inward, spiritual kingdom. It implies the sanctification of the person and the gathered church. This is an aspect of Christ’s mediatorial work. There is then the kingdom of glory. This is the eternal kingdom revealed following the last judgement. It is the blessedness of the person in the heavenly city. Here the trinitarian fullness is revealed in Christ’s completed reign.

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<sup>12</sup> ENNT: Matt. 3:2.

<sup>13</sup> Deschner, 143-144, ft. nt. 8; Deschner quoted from chapter VIII, “The Mediatorial Office of Jesus Christ,” 481 in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*; see the edition, revised and edited, Ernst Bizer; trans., G.T. Thomson, reprint, (Grand Rapids: Baker House Books, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Gerhard Ebeling described Luther’s two kingdom theology as, “two spheres of reality which embrace human existence in the manner of concentric circles.” He then quoted Luther as insisting that the kingdom of Christ should not interfere with the kingdom of the world, and, vice versa, in *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, (London: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., 1970), 177.

The kingdom of grace is not a political governmental system nor is it directly related to economic structures; it is a spiritual kingdom first, with moral laws that are expected to be obeyed. Obedience is only through inner transformation. In this sense economics and politics can be influenced by the kingdom of grace. The life of the church as a gathered people becomes relevant for Wesley in the kingdom of grace. The church has a mission to proclaim the rule of Christ in heart and life. Christology is again seen as pertinent to understanding the reign of Christ. It was not individualistic, there was a communal aspect. According to Ephesians 5: 27 and Matthew 3:12, Christ purifies the church and the Holy Spirit indwells the Church in holiness and purity.<sup>15</sup> Now the church is better prepared for mission. The Church recognises the corruption of the world but still goes into the world, the Church is not to withdraw from the world.<sup>16</sup>

The kingdom of glory is combined with the specific person and the communal church. Believers are justified and sanctified<sup>17</sup> and so perfection remains a constant motif. In the kingdom of glory there is a transformation of our physical bodies,<sup>18</sup> but growth continues<sup>19</sup> and people will reign with Christ.<sup>20</sup> But Wesley's comment on Revelation 22: 4 created an hierarchical system regarding the saints who reign. There were the virtuous saints and the slothful saints. Preference in the kingdom of glory is for the virtuous.

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<sup>15</sup> ENNT: I John 5: 11; Ephesians 4: 10; Revelation 1: 20.

<sup>16</sup> ENNT: I Corinthians 5: 10.

<sup>17</sup> ENNT: Matt. 18: 3; Col. 1:12; II Tim. 2:10.

<sup>18</sup> ENNT: Phil. 3: 21; I Cor. 15: 42-44.

<sup>19</sup> ENNT: Heb. 12: 23; Rev. 7: 9; Matt. 19: 30.

<sup>20</sup> ENNT: Matt. 6:10.



### C. Christ as King and the Defeat of Satan, Death, and Sin

The kingdom life is stated differently in I Corinthians 15:26.<sup>21</sup> After Satan and sin are destroyed then death will also be conquered. John Wesley set up Christ as the conqueror in the sequence of Satan, sin, and then death. In Christ's death Satan and sin are conquered; in his resurrection death is conquered. The trio of Satan, sin, and death will all be destroyed in the final judgement. John Deschner explained Wesley at this point, "Wesley's connection of Christ's kingship with the atonement is seen more clearly when he speaks of Christ's victory over His enemies: Satan, sin and death (I Cor. 15:26). These enemies have no right to be in Christ's world. His victory is not the conquest of new territory, but the repression of the rebellion (Rev. 11:15; 17:14)."<sup>22</sup>

Related to this is the direct implication that since Christ's priestly work cancelled guilt, so Christ's victory is assured. Once guilt is cancelled and sanctification begins the victory is completely Christ's, it is not a human achievement. The result for humanity can only be through participation. According to Deschner the evidence from Wesley on the relation of guilt and victory is sparse but Wesley's account of the Fall offered important indications. Deschner's conclusion is advanced:

Wesley's summary of the fall, then, is as follows: unfaith begot pride, and pride begot foolish desire, which was soon completed in outward sin. At that moment man died! The life-giving relation to God had been broken. "He was full of sin; full of guilt, and tormenting fears."<sup>23</sup>

In this sense the importance of justification by faith, or the removal of guilt, is fundamental to the royal office.

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<sup>21</sup> cf. also, ENNT: Ephesians 4: 8; Hebrews 1: 4.

<sup>22</sup> Deschner, 118.

<sup>23</sup> Deschner, 141, ft. nt. 3.

Importantly Christ's victory is accomplished through his humanity and his humanity is not eliminated in the future kingdom of glory. According to Wesley, Matthew 28: 18 states this with clarity but here Wesley offered no interpretation, "*All power is given to me - Even as Man.*"<sup>24</sup> The emphasis remained in Acts 17: 31 where Christ retains his identity with humanity. Christ in his humanity is on the throne, that is, in human physical life. Christ has transformed the human body and mind yet Christ's divine nature is sovereign since it is eternal. His human nature had a beginning in time and so cannot be equated with the divine. But Christ continues in the human nature as King. Since for Wesley physicalness was corrupt, or dying, the retention of a transformed human physical life appears to indicate the required continuous priestly and victory theme that will restore the dying corrupted physical condition after this earthly life.

Through the cross and resurrection Christ's decisive victory is accomplished but it was not yet an ultimate victory. The cross and resurrection established in principle the defeat of evil but there is a spiritual warfare that continues. The outcome is assured and this is the Christian hope so Christ's victory is a daily experience.<sup>25</sup> There are the seeds of victory in Christ's priestly work and in his prophetic work and eventually it is completed in the final resurrection and judgement. For Wesley, since the victory is certain, as seen in the death and resurrection of Christ, it therefore offers a glimpse of the final victory yet to come. But humanity's response is not quite as certain for in John Wesley's theology there is the possibility of refusal or falling back. Wesley therefore placed emphasis in the present experience. This required an

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<sup>24</sup> ENNT: Matthew 28: 18.

<sup>25</sup> ENNT: I John 3: 8.

interconnection between first, the priestly work, then the prophetic work, and finally, the work of Christ the King. As Deschner correctly understood Wesley's theology, the victory of Christ in his kingly office is an aspect of the priestly work; only through the priestly work can the kingly work be properly asserted.<sup>26</sup>

Christ, in his defeat of Satan, sin, and death won the battle over evil but it appears to be limited to an objective victory. Wesley hesitated to directly relate this to subjective experience within Christ's humanity for humanity. What is missing is any sense of recapitulation since Wesley's model does not incorporate Christ as summing up within himself humanity in order to save humanity. It must be remembered that Wesley refused to allow for Christ's active righteousness to apply to the atonement since he claimed that that led to antinomianism. Instead, in Christ's humanity the victory over Satan, death, and sin allowed Christ to become the inerrant judge of humanity.

Colin Williams did accept, "Wesley's view that enabled him to concentrate in his presentation of the order of salvation, upon the immediate faith relationship with Christ and upon such elements as conversion, new birth, assurance, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and upon these he has an important word to speak."<sup>27</sup> But previous to this assessment Williams criticised Wesley's weakness in developing the full extent of Christ's victory. He stated, "There the stress is on a conscious individual relationship to Christ, and little emphasis is given to the need for the deepening awareness of our enslavement to these demonic forces and to the need for the repetition of Christ's victory in us..."<sup>28</sup> What is missing is Christ taking humanity

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<sup>26</sup> Deschner, 126.

<sup>27</sup> Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 89.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, 88; cf. also Deschner, 115, ft. nt. 17 for a similar criticism.



in himself and becoming victorious for humanity.

#### D. Christ as King and the Last Judgement

What is important to recognise is that the final judgment is part of the continuing experience of salvation offered to humanity. Some comments on Wesley's eschatology are appropriate although the intent is not to develop the idea.<sup>29</sup> The Methodist leader did not accept Christ's descent into hell as there was no point to such an idea since in hell all hope had been lost. The dead immediately existed in Hades with Paradise as a particular abode for the righteous until the final judgment.<sup>30</sup> This was explained in greater detail in his letter to Mary Bishop. First, Wesley commented on the nature of heaven; it was a place where believers would know and love God: "We shall then know both his nature and his works of creation, of providence, and of redemption." Then he added a comment on paradise, the place between death and the final resurrection: "we shall learn more concerning these in an hour than we could in an age during our stay in the body. We cannot tell, indeed, how we shall then exist or what kind of organs we shall have: the soul will not be encumbered with flesh and blood; but probably it will have some sort of ethereal vehicle, even before God clothes us 'with our nobler house of empyrean light.'" <sup>31</sup>

Wesley held no place for the Roman Catholic view of purgatory since in Hades the righteous are separated from the unrighteous and there is in this state an

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<sup>29</sup> See Kenneth Collins, *A Faithful Witness: Wesley's Homiletical Theology*, (Wilmore, Kentucky: Wesley Heritage Press, 1993), 189-203 or Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 345-359 as examples of work on this task. More specifically on the subject of hell see D. Dunn Wilson, "The Importance of Hell for John Wesley," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Vol. XXXIV. 1 (March 1963): 12-16, for a brief account of Wesley's teaching.

<sup>30</sup> Collins, 193.

<sup>31</sup> *Letter to Mary Bishop*, April 17, 1776 (Telford VI), 214.

apparent realisation of the outcome at the final judgment. The judgment in its final form then is not different from the state of a person's spirituality on earth. Again, Wesley was opposed to a position on purgatory as further purification for a future entry into heaven.

All humanity will be judged in the final accounting, Wesley expressed this in words of amazement, "How immense then must be the total multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues! Of all that have sprung from the loins of Adam since the world began, till time shall be no more!,"<sup>32</sup> and the accounting includes the works done during a person's earthly life, "Nor will all the actions alone of every child of man be then brought to open view, but all their words, seeing 'every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.'"<sup>33</sup>

Christ makes the final judgement in relation to the Father<sup>34</sup> and he judges according to his human nature. This appears to be based on the concept that Christ is the norm of human obedience and as a result the problem of sinful humanity is solved through restoration in Christ. In John 5: 27 Christ is judge by being made man; in Acts 17: 31 because of the resurrection of Christ's physical body he is judge; in John 5: 23 Christ is judge in order to vindicate his ministry that was in agreement with the Father. The importance of Christ as judge is emphasised in Wesley's sermon *The Great Assize*. There he stated: "... 'Wherefore God hath highly exalted him,' even in his human nature, and 'ordained him' as man to try the children of men, to be the

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<sup>32</sup> *The Great Assize* II. 4 (BE) 1: 361.

<sup>33</sup> *The Great Assize* II. 6: 362-353; this is repeated in *On the Wedding Garment* proem 10-11 (BE) 4: 144; the righteousness of Christ in justification entitles us to heaven while holiness of life qualifies us for heaven.

<sup>34</sup> ENNT: John 5: 22, 27; Acts 17: 31.

'judge both of the quick and dead'; both of those who shall be found alive at his coming, and of those who were before 'gathered to their fathers'.'<sup>35</sup>

John Wesley was particular in his explanation of the judgment. It would be based on the works of the justified believer. Robert Monk saw in this the Puritan theology of Richard Baxter and Thomas Goodwin. Monk stated, "His attraction to Baxter's and Goodwin's statements on justification was precisely at this point, for they had interpreted obedience and works as necessary to final salvation."<sup>36</sup> There is support for this interpretation in Richard Baxter's seventeenth century document, *Aphorismes of Justification*. Baxter's Thesis LXXII stated:

As accepting of Christ for Lord, (which is the heart's subjection) as an essential part of justifying faith, as the accepting of him for our Saviour: so consequently, sincere obedience, (which is the effect of the former) hath as much to do in justifying us before God, as affiance, (which is the fruit of the later).<sup>37</sup>

Baxter went on to explain: "When they say, We are justified by works of the Gospel; they mean only, that we are sanctified by works that follow faith, and are bestowed by grace; they meriting our inherent justice at God's hands."<sup>38</sup> In referring to Roman Catholic theology Baxter responded, "They take our works to be part of our legal righteousness: I take them not to be the smallest portion of it: but only a part of our evangelical righteousness; or of the condition upon which Christ's righteousness shall be ours."<sup>39</sup>

John Wesley developed the idea of Christ's humanity as judge in a legal

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<sup>35</sup> *The Great Assize* II. 1 (BE) 1: 359.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*, (London: Epworth Press, 1966), 123.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification: with Their Explication Annexed*, (Hague: printed for Abraham Brown, 1656), 183.

<sup>38</sup> Baxter, 196.

<sup>39</sup> Baxter, 196.



format. Jesus, in his humanity, saves humanity and conquers Satan, death, and sin but in this he becomes the judge dividing humanity between the saved and unsaved. Once again it appears that his rejection of the active righteousness of Christ plays an important role in his interpretation and the use of the humanity of Christ. It does not appear that Christ as King saves humanity through the Incarnation. Christ instead becomes the judge to declare salvation. It is Christ's sinless humanity that gave him the authority as final arbiter of the human condition, thus declarative righteousness is the key for humanity in Christ's role as King..

Death concludes all avenues for judgement, there is no purgatory or subsequent opportunity for salvation after death. Death comprises 'paradise,' 'Hades,' and 'hell.' John Deschner drew this overall summary:

We are left to conclude: (1) There is one judgement only, at the last day. (2) Separate souls are kept in an intermediate state until that day. (3) For good men, this state is clearly 'paradise,' although the entire state may also possibly be called 'Hades.' And there is also a 'hell,' not only after, but before the last judgment, in which men may suffer, but not so as to atone for their sins, as in purgatory. (4) This intermediate state is indeterminate in character, although the separate soul knows of his future state, and this knowledge may account for a certain anticipation of the final result in the intermediate states of 'paradise' and 'hell.' (5) Whatever the intermediate state, there is a general resurrection in order that all may be present at the last judgment where their eternal state will be determined.<sup>40</sup>

John Wesley's account of the state of lost humanity has been commented on in the chapter on the priestly work of Christ and the wrath of God. This can be advanced further in relation to the role of Christ as conqueror. Wesley believed that scripture texts such as John 8:15<sup>41</sup> and John 12: 31 supported the idea that Christ's first coming was a judgement on Satan. His return to earth would be a judgement on

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<sup>40</sup> Deschner, 148, footnote 19.

<sup>41</sup> ENNT: John 8: 15: "*Ye judge after the flesh* - As the flesh, that is, corrupt nature, dictates. *I judge no man* - Not thus; not now; not at my first coming."

humanity. In this final judgement all humanity would be raised from the dead<sup>42</sup> and those who by faith in Christ's work were saved would be given entry into the kingdom of glory;<sup>43</sup> the condemned will be eternally punished in hell.<sup>44</sup> Christ in his office as King has become the final judge of all humanity.

Robert Monk also found similarities in John Wesley and Richard Baxter on the subject of two justifications. Again there is a basis for this in Richard Baxter's writings. Thesis XXXVII of the *Aphorismes on Justification* stated:

Justification is either 1. In Title and the sense of the Law; 2. Or in sentence of judgment. The first may be called constitutive; the second declarative: the first virtual, the second actual.<sup>45</sup>

Baxter followed this with, "But justification is judgment, as it is the completing act, so is it mostly called justification; and I think the word in Scripture hath most commonly reference to the Judgment day."<sup>46</sup> The parallels Monk summarised in five points:

(1) justification is not a "once for all" event but has two loci - present and final justification; (2) final justification, or the culmination of the justification process, comes at the judgment event; (3) in this final judgment a believer's obedience and good works will count as a "secondary" condition, and consequently, man's moral responsibilities are integrally related to justification itself; (4) faith is nevertheless the ultimate foundation of both justification events; (5) it is upon "the consideration of the satisfaction made by Christ" that both justifications depend.<sup>47</sup>

Robert Monk continued to ask whether, "a doctrine of final justification does not, on the one hand, threaten the positive and continuing value of the initial justification,

<sup>42</sup> *The Great Assize* I. 1-2 (BE) 1: 357-359.

<sup>43</sup> ENNT: I Peter 1:7: "And glory - Assigned by the great Judge;" also Matt. 25: 34.

<sup>44</sup> ENNT: Mt. 25: 41: *Depart into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels* - Not originally for you; you are intruders into everlasting fire; also Matthew 25: 46; II Thess. 1:9: "They must of necessity, therefore, be cut off from all good, and all possibility of it."

<sup>45</sup> Baxter, 118.

<sup>46</sup> Baxter, 119.

<sup>47</sup> Monk, 127-128.

making it less than truly complete; and, on the other hand, does not a final justification which ultimately depends upon faith threaten the real necessity of works?"<sup>48</sup> It must be remembered, though, that the first justification determines the second justification. The second cannot alter the first. This was true for both Richard Baxter and John Wesley. Monk then agreed with Deschner's analysis that while there is some inconsistency with Wesley's position yet if faith and works are held in an appropriate tension we may learn from the Methodist leader's position on faith and moral responsibility.<sup>49</sup>

#### E. Conclusion

In the economy of salvation the office of Christ the King completes the historical process of salvation. John Wesley attempted to integrate Christ as priest, prophet, and king into the whole experience of salvation and with Christ as King, Satan, sin, and death are defeated. The person who accepts this by faith participates in the history of God's dealings with humanity.

John Wesley's move from justification to sanctification to final salvation was based on the Christological foundation of the work of Christ. It was the work of the Holy Spirit that brought this experience into the life of the participant which resulted in the expectation of a visible holy life lived in relation to other people. In this sense solitary Christianity was a detriment to the Christian witness of the effectiveness of the gospel.

The Christian life was more than the objective experience of justification, it

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<sup>48</sup> Monk, 131.

<sup>49</sup> Monk, 132.



also included the inward recognition of reconciliation, restoration, and renewal. Overall, the particular way that John Wesley expressed this was controversial in the eighteenth century and continues to be controversial in the present discussions of salvation. He did, though, attempt to integrate his theological views with scripture and Christian tradition in order to develop a coherency with human experience. In the final summary and conclusion Wesley's use of Christian tradition will be analysed. His use of the theological tradition is again controversial but this present material has attempted to establish that the western tradition was prominent in his theological formulation. The early church Fathers had an influence but only as their theological construction was useful to Wesley's own practical concerns formulated within the interaction with the western tradition.

## Part Four: Summary and Conclusion

### A. A Summary of John Wesley's Theological Orientation

Perhaps one of the major problems in Wesley studies is the difficulty of imagining an itinerant evangelist as an important theologian. Albert Outler recognised that it is not possible to think of John Wesley as a major systematic theologian since he never attempted an erudite theoretical model for doing theology. Wesley's task was to bring theological studies to the attention of common people but because of this intention Outler believed that Wesley has not been taken seriously by the academic community outside of Methodism. Thus Wesley's thought has been undervalued.<sup>1</sup> Importantly he stated, "we don't have many mass evangelists of record with anything like Wesley's immersion in classical culture, his eager openness to 'modern' science and social change, his awareness of the entire Christian tradition as a living resource and even fewer with his ecclesial vision of a sacramental community as the nurturing environment of Christian experience."<sup>2</sup>

Because Wesley interacted with Church tradition his broadly composed interaction requires an investigation into the doctrine of salvation that recognises the inclusion of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Inevitably, soteriology would be the controversy to which Wesley would have to respond. This leads to the question: did Wesley have a confirmed theological stance or did he vacillate according to new situations and circumstances? Outler claimed, regarding Wesley's theological position, "He denied that he even changed his theological position after 1738, partly because his basic intentions had never changed. But the nuances and

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Outler, "John Wesley's Interests in the Early Fathers of the Church," *The Bulletin by the Committee on Archives and History of the United Church of Canada* 29 (1983): 6.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Outler, "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," in Kenneth Rowe, ed., *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1980), 13.

equilibria of the position *did* change and these changes are only clues I have found to explain his otherwise incredible eclecticism..."<sup>3</sup> Outler then claimed that Wesley's distinctive position in theological formulation was the integration of, "'faith alone' with 'holy living' in an authentic dialectic."<sup>4</sup>

The questions then are, what was the structure of Wesley's theology; how were his doctrines defined; what were the sources he used to create his particular theology? Only when Wesley's theological structure is understood can a complete assessment be made of his use of any church tradition. To that topic a few summary comments can be made since the previous work in this thesis has provided much of the material. All theology begins in God so this final analysis on Wesley's theological tradition will begin with his doctrine of God and then proceed to the doctrine of salvation.

## 1. The Doctrine of God

### a. The Trinity

The evidence derived from John Wesley's writings confirms that he worked from a basic Augustinian theology. At the same time, and apart from Augustine, he began with the economic Trinity and refused to discuss the immanent Trinity. The economic Trinity was grounded in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and this formed the basis for understanding love towards humanity. In this sense the Trinity was crucial to any doctrine of salvation. This also led Wesley to distinguish the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity and so he avoided any type of modalism. Added to

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<sup>3</sup> Outler, "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," 14-15; see also, *JWO*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," 15.



this, the word 'Person' had to be maintained in order to clarify the distinctions within the Trinity.

Wesley was a defender of the filioque clause, the particular contribution of western theology to the understanding of the Trinity. This added to his Augustinian roots and he assumed this theological tradition without any explanation. The Athanasian Creed was also accepted but with qualification. Wesley was concerned that philosophical intrusion had crept into the Creed. Still, the Athanasian Creed is recognised as a Creed based within the Augustinian tradition.

Knowledge of the Trinity came only by faith. Humanity is incapable of perceiving the Triune relationship apart from revelation. From the revelation of God, received by faith, humanity then gains experiential wisdom. This meant, for Wesley, that the Trinity was essential for spiritual wholeness. It was the Father as the source, the Son as the redeemer, and the Spirit as sanctifier that brought renewal and restoration to humanity. Since it would not be possible to conceive of spiritual life apart from the work of the Trinity, Wesley developed a tripartite humanity. He thought of the image of God as the natural, political, and moral image. This tripartite manner followed Augustine's tripartite model except Augustine tended to be more modalistic with Mind: memory, understanding, and will. Wesley's trinitarian pattern was bound together in love since God is love. In this model the basis of worship and salvation was conceived and, it was understood that Wesley's doctrine of the Trinity was central to his theology.

#### b. Christology

Wesley's Christology was developed primarily from a biblical basis interpreted

through the creedal theology of Nicaea and Chalcedon. This was true of the Eastern, Roman Catholic, and Protestant traditions and Wesley never attempted to distinguish between the traditions in relation to Christology. For Wesley, Christology defined Christianity and a discussion on the early Church and Western Patristic thought helped create the basis for assessing his Christological formulation. To understand Wesley's Christology it was necessary to explain the Alexandrian model since similarities were apparent. John Wesley did not attempt to assess the early developments, he accepted the Creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon as standard for his work.

There is sufficient evidence to indicate that Wesley was predominantly a Johannine theologian, and though the Synoptic Gospels revealed Jesus' humanity, the fourth Gospel more adequately revealed his divinity. In the traditional view of Alexandrian theology, along with the overall tendency in traditional Western theology, Wesley was not hesitant to emphasise Jesus' divinity. The humanity of Jesus, according to Wesley, revealed the soteriological intention of the descent from heaven in the Incarnation. Wesley was not Apollinarian in this, neither was he Nestorian or a Monophysite. His Christological problem arose when he asserted that Jesus did not receive his humanity from the substance of Mary. On this matter Wesley was neither Eastern nor Western, he had his own unexplained reason for asserting this position. Wesley was aware of the heresies within the first five centuries of the Church and he equated the Arian heresy with the eighteenth century Socinian and Deist theologians. This critical response seems to be grounded in his reaction against the Enlightenment ideal of reason and individuality. To respond to this challenge Wesley turned to the Augustinian theological system as mediated through the Reformation.

John Wesley drew upon the NT to create the descent movement of the Logos into human life with the return back to heaven. In the descent-ascent motif Wesley was concerned to retain the divinity of Christ over against the Deists and as with all classic Christology of the Nicene-Chalcedonian theology, Christ was the representative of humanity; with this John Wesley agreed. From a Christological perspective Wesley related his thought to the early Christian tradition in a manner that was not unlike western theology and, as a result, there does not appear to be anything distinctive in his formulation of the divinity and humanity of Christ.

### c. Pneumatology

John Wesley began his theology of the Holy Spirit with the assertion that the Spirit was equal to the Father and the Son and was the source of sanctification for humanity. His support for the filioqué clause placed him within the western theological tradition and the filioqué clause, according to Wesley, maintained a more intimate relationship between the Son and the Spirit.

Integral to John Wesley's theology was the inward work of the Holy Spirit. He tried not to be too rigid on the work of the Spirit in a person's life for he did acknowledge the variety of ways that the Spirit could work but there was a general pattern to follow:

1. Preventing grace identified the Spirit at work prior to a person's awareness.

Preventing grace also supported the idea of universal salvation and human responsibility. All humanity could experience God at work, thus all people were accountable for their actions. Human responsibility required God's initial action and only then could there be a saving response from humanity. Wesley found support for



this theology within the Church of England tradition but it had to be recognised that this referred to God at work prior to any apprehension of saving faith.

2. Convincing grace followed preventing grace and referred to the work of the Spirit prior to awareness of pardon. Convincing grace prepared a person for the conscious awareness of the need for salvation. This usually led to initial repentance but this repentance was not equated with repentance for salvation. Wesley called this legal repentance and it referred to a consciousness of sin and a desire to reform a person's life as a result of the work of the Spirit.

3. The third stage of work that the Spirit performed was saving grace. The Spirit was at work to make a person holy. Out of the experience of saving grace the Spirit enabled a person to co-operate with the Spirit in holiness of life. There were two aspects to this. There was the inward action of the Spirit and there was the outward action of visibility in Christian behaviour. The inward and outward work of the Spirit inevitably led to the outworking of the mission of the Church.

4. Following saving grace came sanctifying grace. Wesley found support for his views on sanctification in the writings of various predecessors in the Church of England, particularly in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth Caroline theologians. There was no doubt that explaining his views on Christian perfection created one of Wesley's greatest controversies.

5. Finally, there was the "means of grace." Wesley primarily focused on prayer, scripture, and the Lord's Supper to explain the means of grace. These activities mediate the presence of the Spirit but were not to be considered as automatic means of grace. Such spiritual exercises could only be effective through the presence of the Spirit.

Overall the source of discovery of holy living came from the wide variety of

theological writings within the seventeenth and eighteenth century Church of England. These writers incorporated the theology of the early Church Fathers but Wesley made use of this tradition following the western Augustinian formulation. This meant that Wesley's eclectic use of tradition along with the prior authority of scripture made for a complex theology of the work of the Holy Spirit.

This summary of Christology and Pneumatology indicates that the doctrine of God created the foundation for Wesley's understanding of salvation. Though his work was controversial when he applied the doctrinal foundation to experience, the evidence suggests that experience was not the starting point for his theology. This interpretation is strengthened with his economic trinitarianism.

## 2. Key Theological Doctrines Arising From the Doctrine of God

John Wesley claimed to be a 'High' Churchman. His loyalty to the Church of England is evident in his defence of the Church throughout the eighteenth century development of the Methodist movement. Wesley's doctrine of salvation must then be understood in light of the Thirty-Nine Articles in the *Book of Common Prayer*. A comparison between the Thirty-Nine Articles and Wesley's Twenty-Five Articles sent to the Methodist societies in North America clearly demonstrated a direct dependency on the *BCP*. The differences were in minor word changes although the one change that Wesley made, which related to the whole of classic theological tradition, was his innovation that Jesus' humanity was not from the substance of Mary. Overall the Thirty-Nine Articles had their origin in Lutheran theology, particularly in the Confessions of Augsburg and Württemberg. The Reformed theology of John Calvin was later to exert a powerful influence although the Thirty-Nine Articles stayed clear

of the strict hyper-Calvinism with regard to predestination. This left the legacy of the continental Reformation deeply embedded in the Church of England with a thorough Augustinian background.

There are certain theological concepts, models, and terms that Wesley implemented that clarified his western theological roots. His basic model for salvation was subsumed within the Anselmic understanding of the atonement. Here he was in line with the Church of England, Puritan, and the continental Reformation theologians. Sin was a debt owed to God which humanity was incapable of paying. This key position was combined with justification by faith. The specifics of justification by faith were taught to Wesley by the Moravian Lutherans and Wesley also found the idea in John Calvin and he was not hesitant to acknowledge his indebtedness to both theological systems for his eventual definition of justification by faith. This meant that Wesley's theological career was an open interaction with Lutheran, Calvinist, and seventeenth and eighteenth Church of England theologies.

Justification by faith was not a work but a gift from God and only by faith could a person respond to God. This gave the impetus for a re-evaluation of Wesley's theology with the recognition of the priority of Christ's Priestly Office. Now the primary source for understanding Christian experience had been set. Wesley stated that his support for this came from Luther and Calvin. Added to this, Wesley's later defence of two justifications, one in the present experience and the second at the final judgment came from his reading of Richard Baxter.

This further led Wesley to support the inner relationship of God's love, justice, and wrath. What concerned this Oxford don was the idea that a person would appeal to Christ's active righteousness as standing in place of human active righteousness.



This meant, for Wesley, that a person did not need to lead a holy life, claiming instead that Christ accomplished that for him. For Wesley this idea laid the grounds for antinomianism, so Wesley rejected the active righteousness of Christ as effective for human salvation. Christ's active righteousness, in Wesley's theology, referred only to Christ's own earthly life and ministry.

It is clear that Wesley never appealed to recapitulation and the understanding of the earthly life of Christ compelling the believer to lead a holy life. Instead, Wesley's support for the passive righteousness of Christ as summing up all of salvation was his only appeal for the salvation of humanity. This led Wesley to posit the imputation of Christ's passive righteousness to humanity who receive it by faith. The only ground for salvation is Jesus' death and resurrection, not his earthly ministry and constant victory over sin. At this point John Wesley separated himself from the Reformed theology of John Calvin and his eighteenth century followers.

His specific account of encountering holy living as a theological student was with Jeremy Taylor, Thomas à Kempis, and William Law. He did find support for a doctrine of holiness in the early tradition, such as Pseudo-Macarius, but even here he was not uncritical of the early tradition for it had to fit his interpretation of scripture. Though Wesley encountered a great deal of controversy in his explanation of Christian perfection, his appeal for support was based primarily on scriptural texts grounded in a western oriented theology. All of the debates that he encountered were conceived within this tradition. Particularly his doctrine of sin, humanity, and the atonement had a structure in a western theological direction.

Original sin was described within the Augustinian tradition. From this tradition he would later become a convinced traducian theologian. It is hard to escape

the language of guilt in Wesley's explanation of the atonement and along with this he defended infant baptism as washing away the guilt of sin which satisfied the justice of God. Sin was, according to Wesley, dishonour to God and the solution to the sin problem was repayment of the debt owed to God. His one development, particular to him, was to assert that the physical had not been permeated with sin. In this manner he developed his idea that appealed neither to western nor eastern thought. Salvation, then, was designed to restore the mind, or soul and since it was the mind that needed to be restored Wesley could centre his understanding of holiness on voluntary transgressions. This was another one of his greatest controversies to overcome as it affected his doctrine of Christian perfection. Added to this, his appeal to freedom from sin was based on his interpretation of scriptural texts rather than to a particular theological tradition.

The priestly and prophetic offices continuously worked in a person's life and the kingly office of Christ became the culmination of the entire work of salvation. Christ was to reign in a person's life but also in social institutions and in creation. Grace (the present kingdom) and glory (the future kingdom) were defined along Reformed theological structures. What is found in Wesley's theological thought that dominates the various aspects of his complex system is the influence of Augustine, the medieval Roman Catholic mystics, the Reformation theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin, the English Puritans and finally the seventeenth and eighteenth theologians of the Church of England, particularly those within the school of holy living. These sources can be documented as directly influencing Wesley, according to his own account, and any full scale study of the development of John Wesley's thought would require taking these western influences quite seriously.

John Wesley was a student of Christian tradition and he never veered from the foundation of the classical Creeds, especially Nicaea and Chalcedon along with the whole of Christian tradition with varying emphasis in order to develop his distinctive theological approach. Along with tradition Wesley developed an experiential theology within the theological influence of the Church of England, particularly using the Caroline theologians, the Cambridge Platonists, Bishop Peter Browne, and eventually John Locke. But his use of tradition, experience, and reason took a secondary role to the primacy of scripture. Inevitably this created a complex theological system designed to be in touch with the mission of the Church.



## Appendix 1

***Book of Common Prayer: Articles XI – XVIII, Including Article II and XXXI******Article XI Of the Justification of Man***

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings: Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily on Justification.

***Article XII Of Good Works***

Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's Judgement; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.

***Article XIII Of Works Before Justification***

Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the school authors say) deserve grace of congruity: yea, rather for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.

***Article XIV Of Works of Supererogation***

Voluntary works, besides, over and above God's commandments, which they call works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render to God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for His sake than the bounden duty is required: whereas Christ saith plainly, When ye have done all that are commanded to you, say, We are unprofitable servants.

***Article XV Of Christ Alone Without Sin***

Christ in the truth of our nature was made like unto us in all things, sin only except, from which He was clearly void, both in His flesh, and in His spirit. He came to be the Lamb without spot, Who by the sacrifice of Himself once made, should take away the sins of the world: and sin, as S. John saith, was not in him. But all we the rest, although baptised and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things, and if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

*Article XVI Of Sin After Baptism*

Not every deadly sin willingly committed after baptism is sin against the Holy Spirit and unpardonable. Wherefore the great repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after baptism. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may rise again, and amend our lives. And therefore, they are to be condemned, which say they can no more sin as long as they live here, or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

*Article XVII Of Predestination and Election*

Predestination to life, is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) He hath constantly decreed by His counsel secret to us to deliver from curse and lamentation, those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore they which he endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season: they through grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length by God's mercy, they attain everlasting felicity. As the godly consideration of predestination, and our salvation in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: so, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation. Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in Holy Scripture: and in our doings, that will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.

*Article XVIII Of Obtaining Eternal Salvation Only in the Name of Christ*

They are also to be had accursed that presume to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he profeseth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law, and the light of nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.

***Two Additional Articles: Article II and Article XXXI******Article II Of the Word or Son of God, Which Was Made Very Man***

...who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile His Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.

***Article XXXI Of the One Oblation of Christ Finished Upon the Cross***

The offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone. Wherefore the sacrifices of Masses, in which it was commonly said, that the Priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, were blasphemous fables, and dangerous deceits.



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